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Space and place in gallery installation

Balázs and the 'universal language' of film

Practical melodrama in the Fereshteh trilogy

Chantal Akerman in New York City

The Colour dossier

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The editors regret to announce the death of Manuel Alvarado (1948–2010), Education Officer of SEFT, and Editor of *Screen Education*, 1974–78.

A deictic turn: space and location in contemporary gallery film and video installation

ALISON BUTLER

Contemporary gallery film and video installation unsettles critics. Freed from the constraints of old technology it has acquired a ‘seductive immateriality’.¹ Instead of the ‘activated spectatorship’ promoted by other types of installation it encourages passive viewing and ‘mimetic engulfment’.² The concerns that it provokes cluster around two related issues: medium and location. Kate Mondloch compares it unfavourably with the expanded cinema works of the 1960s and 1970s, in which a politicized critique of the medium is embodied in a spatial dialectic:

By dispersing focus across screen spaces that coexist and indeed sometimes compete with the actual exhibition space, certain screen-reliant installations generate a forceful critical effect that hinges precisely on this tension between virtual screen space and actual space. In a curious amalgamation of gallery-based spatial experimentation and political aesthetics, this model of spectatorship proposes that viewers be both ‘here’ (embodied subjects in the material exhibition space) and ‘there’ (observers looking onto screen spaces) now.³

She goes on to ask whether the current wave of screen-based installation work may have dissipated this critical effect into a spatial aporia that she conjectures might be symptomatic of the dislocated subjectivity identified by cultural theorists from Fredric Jameson to Paul Virilio: ‘Are we, as spectators of these present-day, screen-reliant installations, both here and there – or, perhaps more ominously, are we neither fully here nor

1 Liz Kotz, ‘Video projection: the space between screens’, in Tanya Leighton (ed.), *Art and the Moving Image: a Critical Reader* (London: Tate Publishing and Afterall, 2008), p. 379.

2 Claire Bishop, *Installation Art* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), ch. 3.

3 Kate Mondloch, ‘Be here (and there) now: the spatial dynamics of screen-reliant installation art’, *Art Journal*, vol. 66, no. 3 (2007), pp. 23–4.

4 Ibid., p. 33.

5 Catherine Fowler, 'Into the light: re-considering off-frame and off-screen space in gallery films', *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, vol. 6, no. 3 (2008), pp. 254-255.

6 Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: the Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 18.

7 Fowler, 'Into the light', pp. 253-67.

8 Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: from Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), p. 3.

9 See Marc Augé, *Non-Places: an Introduction to Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 1995).

10 See O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*; Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Rosalind Krauss, 'A Voyage on the North Sea': *Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (New York, NY: Thames and Hudson, 1999).

there?⁴ Catherine Fowler has also noted these contrasting spatial dynamics. She argues that contemporary artists have returned to the 'frontal flat image' and to narrative and illusionist conventions, replacing the earlier emphasis on the 'off-frame' (the actual, material space of projection) with a stress on the 'off-screen' (the virtual or fictional space implied beyond the frame).⁵ This shift from an insistence on materiality, directing the viewer's attention to the screening situation in the gallery, to a play with referentiality, directing the viewer's attention to an imaginary elsewhere, might seem like an art-historical regression to the framed picture that Brian O'Doherty compares to 'a portable window that, once set on the wall, penetrates it with deep space'.⁶ However, Fowler reads it not as the return of cinematic illusionism but as a confrontation with the limits of representability, gesturing, in the words of Gilles Deleuze, towards 'a more radical elsewhere, outside homogenous space and time'.⁷

The wider context for this change is the proliferation, over the past three decades, of the virtual window as a metaphor for the graphical user interfaces of digital screens and the multiplication of those windows, a development which Anne Friedberg claims has brought about 'a paradigm shift in visual address' towards complex, fragmented, multidimensional space.⁸ As a consequence of new media, the everyday experience of spatial location has been complicated by technologies of simulation, immersion, telepresence and surveillance. The emergence of new spaces of circulation, consumption and communication – 'non-places' – has had profound anthropological effects, breaking down distinctions between local and global, interior and exterior, here and elsewhere, and, ultimately, self and other.⁹ Taking its starting point from a contextual examination of the spatial dynamics of the earlier wave of gallery film, this essay will argue, through detailed analysis of three recent works, that there has been a 'deictic turn' towards more complex and mutable conceptions of space and location in gallery film, and that this development is less a symptom of these cultural and technological developments than a necessary response to them.

A number of influential accounts of artists' film in the 1960s and 1970s have situated it in relation to trends in the visual and plastic arts of the period, particularly the spatial rotation out of the vertical plane of painting and traditional sculpture and into the horizontal field of an event.¹⁰ For example, in the catalogue for the milestone exhibition *Into the Light*, Chrissie Iles writes:

Building on Minimalism's phenomenological approach, the darkened gallery's space invites participation, movement, the sharing of multiple viewpoints, the dismantling of the single frontal screen, and an analytical, distanced form of viewing. The spectator's attention turns from the illusion on the screen to the surrounding space, and to the physical mechanisms and properties of the moving image: the projector beam as sculptural form, the transparency and illusionism of the cinema

screen, the internal structure of the film frame, the camera as extension of the body's own mental and ocular recording system, the seriality of the slide sequence, and the interlocking structure of multiple video images.¹¹

Iles locates artists' film of the 1960s and 1970s in relation to the 'expanded field', as Rosalind Krauss has described it, of postminimalist sculpture.¹² This notion of spatial expansion also informs Krauss's understanding of structural film, which she situates as a practice interrelated with postminimalist sculpture. Krauss imagines the significance of Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1967) for sculptor Richard Serra in spatial terms:

Snow's film enacts itself as pure horizontal thrust, such that its inexorable forward movement is able to create the abstract spatial metaphor for film's relation to time, now essentialized as the dramatic mode of suspense. Serra's own drive to make sculpture a condition of something like a phenomenological vector, itself the experience of horizontality, would thus have found aesthetic confirmation in *Wavelength*.¹³

In this account, the project of structural film serves as a model for other art forms, as a modernist and medium-specific practice that goes beyond the reductive Greenbergian equation of medium with the artwork's physical support to investigate all dimensions of the cinematic *dispositif*, including its spatial and temporal elaboration of the vectors connecting subjects to objects. In a similar vein, Benjamin Buchloh identifies Richard Serra's 'sculptural film' as the logical evolution of process sculpture.¹⁴ Buchloh suggests that the spatial continuum posited by Serra's large sculptures is experienced by viewers as a mode of transition to the temporal continuum, and that this development led Serra directly to film, 'since the perception of a spatial-temporal field is the very principle of film'.¹⁵ George Baker responds to Buchloh in an essay on the 'solid light' films made by Anthony McCall between 1973 and 1975, which he terms 'filmic sculptures'. Baker suggests that the interplay of sculpture and film at the moment of postminimalism did not entail the fusion of disparate forms, or the development from one form into another, so much as the exploration of the limits of each medium: 'something *essential* to the logic of each medium was being discovered through breaking the modernist taboos around medium specificity, through exposing each form to the other'.¹⁶ Countering the teleological drift of Buchloh's argument that 'sculptural reflection reaches its most advanced position precisely at the point where sculpture as a concrete phenomenon is transcended and transformed into sculptural film', Baker suggests that the interpenetration of the two mediums is less a 'dialectical historical development' from sculpture into film than 'a moment in history when "development" was precisely thrown into question, when the expansion of forms rather began to circulate around a limit and its transgression'.¹⁷

11 Chrissie Iles, *Into the Light: the Projected Image in American Art, 1964-1977* (New York, NY: Whitney Museum, 2001), p. 33.

12 Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the expanded field', *October*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1979), pp. 30-44.

13 Krauss, 'A Voyage on the North Sea', p. 26.

14 Benjamin Buchloh, 'Process sculpture and film in Richard Serra's work' (1978), reprinted in Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

15 *Ibid.*, p. 418.

16 George Baker, 'Film beyond its limits', *Grey Room*, no. 25 (2006), p. 101.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 103.

18 Krauss, 'A Voyage on the North Sea', p. 56.

19 Krauss, in 'Sculpture in the expanded field', also connects the expanded field with the loss of medium specificity and the emergence of postmodernism.

20 See Fried, *Art and Objecthood*.

21 Tamara Trodd, 'Lack of fit: Tacita Dean, modernism and the sculptural film', *Art History*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2008), p. 373.

22 Anthony McCall, 'Two statements', in P. Adams Sitney (ed.), *The Avant-Garde Film: a Reader of Theory and Criticism* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1978), p. 250.

23 Ibid.

For both mediums, the expanded field opens the vexed question of specificity. Krauss's discussion of structural film is situated within a wider discussion of the post-medium condition and the reinvention of mediums as differentially specific rather than self-identical. The association of the expanded field with artistic heterogeneity is most evident in her denigration of 'the international fashion of intermedia and installation work, in which art essentially finds itself complicit with a globalization of the image in the service of capital'.¹⁸ (Indeed, in the essay in which she originally proposed the idea of the 'expanded field' it is identified with postmodernism.¹⁹) Michael Fried's famous diatribe against 'theatricality' in minimalist sculpture is another expression of concern that the expansion of the sculptural field threatens the identity of sculpture as a medium.²⁰

If the articulation of sculptural questions through film enabled sculptors to go beyond the limits of their medium, the articulation of filmic questions in sculptural terms had the paradoxical effect of limiting the definition of film as a medium by setting the materiality of the apparatus over and against the referentiality of the image. Tamara Trodd describes the sculptural model as a historical constraint on the development of artists' film:

So it is that since the 1960s and 1970s, artist's film has often seemed obliged to follow an imperative to be anti-narrative, to occupy the flattened temporal horizon of an extended experiential present, and to be anti-illusionist. Such a route is a consequence of the critical view that gallery film develops from a certain construction of the sculptural model, film, as it takes on the conditions of sculpture, becoming more palpably materialist and devoted to a physically heightened experience of the present moment.²¹

Trodd's understanding of the sculptural model as a spatial and temporal construct accords with Anthony McCall's description of *Line Describing a Cone* (1974) as 'the first film to exist solely in real, three-dimensional, space'. McCall writes: 'This film exists only in the present: the moment of projection. It refers to nothing beyond this real time. (In contrast, most films allude to a past time.) It contains no illusion.'²² Less abstract works of this period deploy real space as a way of undermining illusionist conventions. In Snow's *Two Sides to Every Story* (1974), two films are projected onto either side of a thin metal screen, each film showing the same woman performing a series of actions, shot simultaneously with two cameras from opposite sides. The spectator is free to move around, viewing the screens head-on or obliquely. Snow describes the work's concern as 'a certain plastic skepticism'.²³

The illusion could be quite strong directly facing the images, but as you move around different points of view make it less strong; on the edges it disappears. You see the illusion more than the realism as you move around the sides. The image gets flatter and thinner, and thinner and thinner. The work escapes from the idea of looking out a window that

²⁴ Michael Snow, *The Collected Writings of Michael Snow* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1994), p. 196.

²⁵ Presented at BFI Southbank, London, in 2008. The work exists in earlier versions, and at the time of writing could be seen at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNQH-UknEnE>> [accessed 7 June 2010].

usually happens when films are projected on a wall or when anything is put on a wall with a frame around it.²⁴

In *Two Sides to Every Story*, referential space and time are framed and undercut by actual space and time.

While there may appear to be some initial similarities between Snow's work and Pierre Bismuth and Michel Gondry's recent installation *The All-Seeing Eye (The Hardcore Techno Version)* (2008), close analysis reveals a very different spatial dynamic at work.²⁵ The video shows a well-furnished bourgeois apartment, filmed in successive rotations of a revolving camera, during which objects disappear from the room until it is left empty. A revolving projector doubles the camera's motion, projecting a rotating view of the apartment onto the walls of the screening room. The careful alignment of projected space and space of projection makes the two rooms appear almost spatially coextensive, encouraging viewers to feel that they have entered the set. Although it is not immediately apparent that the set is a scaled-down model, there are other overt indications of its artifice, including the picture-postcard views of global landmarks from its windows, among them St Basil's Cathedral in Moscow's Red Square and the Antonium in Brussels. Artifice – or artfulness – is also suggested by the furnishing of the apartment entirely with design classics and *objets d'art*, as if it were a museum display. The repetition of these objects – three Eames lounge chairs and ottomans side by side, three identical fireplaces on one wall, four matching pot plants in a row – suggests simulation (ironically, given that the set is actually hand crafted, and was manipulated during the shoot by a team of assistants rather than through digital editing). Layering one conceit upon another, the set includes a television screen showing Gondry's *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004). The title of the work evokes the panopticon, but the removal of objects from the set while the camera is turned away emphasizes the fact that, far from being an all-seeing eye, the camera sees only partial views. The frame here is a moving window, continuously opening the diegesis with its leading edge and closing it as it passes (and missing all the offscreen action in the process). The gradual disappearance of all the objects undermines the viewer's comprehension: as the set changes we struggle to check our perception of it against memory, and even as we try to recall the room more items are removed, so that, like the protagonist of *Eternal Sunshine*, we find ourselves racing against time to fix the scene in our minds before everything vanishes. At the end of this subtractive process, viewers find themselves back in the white cube (and in case they fail to note the significance of this return, the last item to disappear is a Warholian Brillo box).

The All-Seeing Eye supplies strong spatial cues that encourage viewers to subscribe to the illusion of a life-sized three-dimensional room overlaid on, or displacing, their actual environment, but then begins to withdraw this frame of reference as soon as it has been established. Because this

withdrawal is gradual it is experienced as the replacement of one spatial illusion by a succession of others (each with fewer objects), so that instead of doubling filmic space with gallery space the installation progressively reduces the discernible disparity between the two. Paradoxically, then, an awareness of our actual location arises from directional cues that are routed – or misrouted – through represented space rather than pointing directly to the screening room. Unfolding like a sophistic argument, *The All-Seeing Eye* claims actual space as an effect of its own internal structuring, while at the same time ensuring, through its self-conscious humour, that this claim is not taken too seriously.

The spatial dynamics of *Two Sides to Every Story* and *The All-Seeing Eye* can be differentiated in terms of their deployment of deixis. Deixis is a linguistic term for referential words that depend on context for their meaning, including adverbs such as ‘here’ and ‘now’ and pronouns such as ‘I’ and ‘you’. In linguistics, deixis and indexicality are closely related, almost to the point of interchangeability, whereas in film aesthetics the only sense in which the terms seem to overlap is in the implied temporality of the index (what Barthes calls the ‘this-has-been’ of photography). Mary Ann Doane considers deixis in film as one of the two divergent understandings of the indexical, as imprint and as indicator.²⁶ In an analysis of *M* (Fritz Lang, 1931), Doane associates the index in the deictic sense with the accusatory finger, pointing into offscreen space to indicate some past or future event: ‘What is being indicated, indexed, brought to our attention is the frame itself, as the border between everything and nothing, as the cinematic equivalent of the “this”’. The frame, she concludes, ‘coordinates and necessitates the dialectic of Peirce’s two, seemingly incompatible, definitions of the index, as trace and deixis. The frame directs the spectator to look here, now, while the trace reconfirms that something exists to be looked at.’²⁷

A different understanding of deixis is offered by Warren Buckland. While broadly in agreement with Christian Metz’s argument that as *histoire* rather than *discours* the fiction film does not usually deploy pronominal deixis (there is no ‘I’ or ‘you’), Buckland suggests that in certain situations – including live broadcasts and home movies – film and television may be deictic.²⁸ His account of deixis in film suggests that it is a secondary and contingent effect linked to the screening as an event. While site-specific screenings of films are clearly deictic, gallery screenings in general have deictic tendencies, if only because, in the absence of a fully institutional framework, attention is drawn to the site of the screening. As Andrew Uroskie argues, the prominent thematization of location and dislocation in gallery film is the inevitable consequence of its uncertain position between the institutions and traditions of the cinema and the gallery. In the conventionalized setting of the cinema the deictic potential of the cinematic image is minimized, but once prised from its institutional home the cinematic image discloses ‘its brazen link with the local and the distant’.²⁹

26 Mary Ann Doane, ‘The indexical and the concept of medium specificity’, *Differences*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2007), pp. 128–52.

27 Ibid, p.140.

28 Warren Buckland, *The Cognitive Semiotics of Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 71.

29 Andrew V. Uroskie, ‘Siting cinema’, in Leighton (ed.), *Art and the Moving Image*, p. 397.

30 Patrice Pavis and Christine Schantz, *Dictionary of the Theatre* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), p. 286.

31 Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 126.

32 Cormac Power, *Presence in Play: a Critique of Theories of Presence in Theatre* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), pp. 192, 175.

33 Friedberg, *The Virtual Window*, pp. 4-5.

While the notion of deixis does not feature prominently in the critical vocabulary of writers on installation art, it is a central concept in theatre theory, where it is used to specify the effect of *presence* and its discursive actualization. Theorists of theatre have defined presence in terms not only of the performance of an actor or the attendance of an audience, but of the ‘continual *present* of the stage and its enunciation’.³⁰ Presence is enunciated deictically, and this is the degree zero of theatre, as Keir Elam asserts: ‘the drama consists first and foremost in this, an *I* addressing a *you here and now*’.³¹ Spectators are implicated in the complex pattern of reference and signification that subtends theatrical performance, not only by actively identifying and interpreting elements of the performance that are present as themselves (bodies, props) and elements of the performance that function through reference to the wider world (classes of objects, locations, social relations), but also as points of reference in their own right. Theatre spectators consciously and unconsciously negotiate shifting and contradictory ways of locating the performance in space and time and continuous modulations of their own presence at, and absence from, the performance. Cormac Power argues that ‘theatre communicates *from* somewhere – characteristically a stage – and this “somewhere” is continuously present throughout the experience’, but that theatre is also an art form that ‘poses questions about presence rather than one that asserts an unproblematic “here and now”’.³² The defining role of deixis in theatre arises from the fact that performances, unlike films, actualize meaning in relation to concrete spatiotemporal contexts shared with their audiences. To describe gallery films as deictic in a theatrical sense, then, is to suggest that the ‘theatricalization’ of film in the gallery complicates spectatorship, dividing attention between screen space and screening space and subjecting the spectator’s qualified belief in the cinematic illusion to continual – spatial, temporal and discursive – modulation.

Beyond its narrow linguistic forms, the functions and effects of deixis are determined by the medium in which it is deployed, and these change as mediums collide or converge. In the case of film, the ambiguity of the term – its potential but uncertain application to either or both the referential space on (and off) the screen and/or the real space of the screening room – is in itself an expression of certain attributes of the medium. Among new media technologies, deictic forms exhibit contradictory tendencies: in immersive virtual environments deixis works with perspectival representation, three-dimensional imaging systems and haptics to create perceptual cues strong enough to displace the actual environment in favour of a simulated environment; in other forms of interface, however, multiple windows require users to move between a number of different deictic frames of reference. Deictic terms feature prominently in Friedberg’s description of the new visual vernacular: ‘A “windowed” multiplicity of perspectives implies new laws of “presence” – not only here and there, but also *then* and *now* – a multiple view – sometimes enhanced, sometimes diminished – out the window’.³³

34 Peter Gidal, 'The theory and definition of structural/materialist film', in Gidal (ed.), *Structural Film Anthology* (London: British Film Institute, 1976).

35 Doane, 'The indexical and the concept of medium specificity', p. 137.

Through explorations of the constraints and interactions of mediums, the artists' films and expanded cinema of the 1960s and 1970s developed a hybrid form of textual and situational deixis that aimed, as Peter Gidal trenchantly argued, to undercut the repression of real space and real time.³⁴ In a mediatized environment, contemporary gallery filmmakers can no longer derive critical effects from reference to 'real space' and 'real time', if only because these are no longer understood as the unalloyed substance of everyday experience. Complex and contradictory deictics have become the necessary tools of a form that is addressed precisely to the contemporary condition of being both here and there, yet neither here nor there.

According to Doane, Snow's word movie *So Is This* (1982) is a rare example of pure linguistic deixis in film; she also claims the forty-five-minute zoom in *Wavelength* as an embodiment of the index as spatial deixis.³⁵ But this is only one aspect of *Wavelength*, which interlaces its illusion of spatial depth with an insistence on the flatness of the screen and the materiality of film, established through changes in film stock, exposure and processing. In *Wavelength* and *Two Sides to Every Story* the deictic function of the frame is offset against the material presence of the apparatus, particularly the screen. By contrast, in *The All-Seeing Eye* there is no screen at all and the apparatus is assimilated to the space of projection (the projector is visible, turning silently in the centre of the room, but at a height above spectators' heads that prevents it from drawing much attention). The mobile frame reads like a searchlight, as if the represented space were being revealed rather than projected. This forceful deictic is not countered by anything within the screening space but is undone from within the frame by the contradictory logics of the image itself, which invoke the two most powerful, but mutually exclusive, tendencies of the electronic image: surveillance and simulation. To accompany *The All-Seeing Eye*, Bismuth made several sculptures featuring miniature models like those used in the shoot, as if the materiality displaced in the installation must find an outlet elsewhere, and could do so only through the logic of transmediality. The dematerialization of the cinematic apparatus in the post-medium condition renders the critical strategies of the 1960s and 1970s literally groundless.

While the return of the frame as window could be seen in this context as a symptom of a resurgent illusionism, it can also be seen as an alternative critical strategy that mirrors the turn in recent film theory from materialism to ontology. In the digital era, film seems most sharply defined not by its apparatus but by its indexical nature; and in fact this is not really a turn away from materialism, as this indexical quality is, before all else, material – the point of actual contact between the image and its referent. The two senses of the index, as trace and deixis, correlate closely with the two major strands of argument that run through André Bazin's film theory. For artists who continue to work in film, such as Tacita Dean, the combination of index and trace, or spatial and temporal deixis, has become the defining property of the medium.

Fig. 1. *Boots* (Tacita Dean, 2003), 16mm colour anamorphic, optical sound, 20 mins. Courtesy of the artist and Frith Street Gallery, London.



36 Robert Steane, an old friend of Dean's family, affectionately named after his orthopaedic shoe.

Dean's *Boots* (2003) is an installation comprising three 16mm anamorphic films, each twenty minutes long, shown on separate screens in adjacent spaces or rooms. It was shot in an empty mansion, the Casa Serralves in Oporto, considered the most notable example of art deco architecture in Portugal (figure 1). It is a double portrait of the house and of the elderly 'Boots',³⁶ whose cosmopolitanism, mythomania and fluency in three European languages match the storied sophistication of the house. The Portuguese aristocrat Carlos Alberto Cabral inherited the house in the 1920s and commissioned an international team of architects and designers to rebuild and refurbish it. Because of the disruption of the war the work of reconstruction took two decades, and Cabral lived there only briefly in the 1940s before financial difficulties forced him to sell up. Like many of the architectural structures that interest Dean, Casa Serralves is emblematic of an unfulfilled aspiration to modernity, infused with Portugal's national melancholy, *saudade*.

The three films are differentiated by the language spoken by Boots into English, French and German versions, each taking a slightly different itinerary around the house. Compositional choices hint at the possibility of three different national cultural perspectives, especially in the French version where an exterior view emphasizes the symmetry of the garden in the French formal tradition; but there is no systematic disaggregation of the house's architectural internationalism. Boots reminisces about his (fictional) affair with Cabral's wife Blanche, whom he characterizes slightly differently in each of the three languages. The relationship between the three films does not consist in contradiction or systematic differentiation so much as in variance: they present three putative histories of Boots and the Casa Serralves.

Dean's use of long takes and fixed-frame camerawork makes duration the measure of change, so that subtle shifts in light and shade over time are registered as significant events. Walking with an orthopaedic boot and stick, Boots is often heard approaching long before he appears in the frame. He does not appear in all of the shots, his presence functioning as a point of reference rather than the focal point of the film. He acts as a measure of scale in space and duration in time, both of which seem more uncertain when he is absent from the shot. It is at these times that the

spectator experiences the most intense absorption, as if the absence of a human subject within the frame makes room for the spectator. Framing emphasizes views through apertures in the structure: windows, doorways, ornate ironwork, the gapped balustrade of a clerestory and the railings of a balcony. These largely rectilinear openings appear as analogies for the film frame but also as portals to another time. Boots comments on the ghosts of the house: 'I have the feeling that they are still here, but in another dimension ... and this whole house is in another dimension'.

As an architectural space, the house seems to defy conventional logic at every turn: a mirrored door misleads the eye, appearing as an opening; a beam of sunlight appears as solid as a stucco column; a glorious sunset, reflected in the building's windows and French doors, is broken up into discontinuous segments; the squares within squares in the parquet flooring create an Escheresque illusion of depth. Because the editing makes limited use of spatial continuities, neither Boots's nor the camera's peregrinations around the house can be constructed as a linear tour, making the interior space of the house seem complex and unstable. The film's explicit orientation towards the past renders this spatial instability as an effect of temporal uncertainty. Each of the three films has a diurnal structure (as do many of Dean's films), ending at sunset with the appearance of swallows and stars. The sound of heavy traffic passing nearby and the occasional image of a passing aeroplane signal the proximity of a more technologically advanced world. The confluence of historical time, subjective time and meteorological time at the cinematic magic hour confers an extraordinary quality on the house, composed equally of its obsolete modernity and its cinematic (de)realization: a time-machine for living. As Trodd points out:

While Dean makes films which engage with the work of remembering the past, her work emerges from an engagement not so much with obsolescence per se as with the anachronistic tout court. ... The doubly displaced condition of the anachronistic means that these objects are not to be securely located in the past, from whence they might be resurrected to 'redeem' our present, but lodged, rather, in some perpetually fictionalized, hypothetical version of an outdated future, which never happened, and around which time has grown strange.³⁷

The anachronism and dislocation with which Dean engages is, of course, not only that of her architectural and human subjects but also that of her medium. Dean's understanding of film as a medium in which time and space 'grow strange' is deeply indebted to the thinking of artist Robert Smithson.³⁸ In his essay 'A cinematic atopia', Smithson writes:

The sites in films are not to be located or trusted. All is out of proportion.

Scale is out of proportion. We wander between the towering and the bottomless. We are lost between the abyss within us and the boundless horizons outside us. Any film wraps us in uncertainty.³⁹

³⁷ Trodd, 'Lack of fit', p. 385.

³⁸ Two works, the audio CD *Trying to Find the Spiral Jetty* (1997) and the video *From Columbus, Ohio to the Partially Buried Woodshed* (1999), attest to Smithson's profound influence on Dean, which Dean has described as 'an incredible excitement and attraction across time; a personal repartee with another's thinking and energy, communicated through their work'. Tacita Dean, *Location* (Basel: Museum für Gegenwartskunst, 2000), p. 44.

³⁹ Robert Smithson, 'A cinematic atopia', in Jack Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson: the Collected Writings* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), p. 141.

In his own work Smithson used film to extend the conceptual logic that he explored in sculptures, installations and land art, specifically around the notions of site and 'non-site'. In the installation *Non-Sites* (1968), material collected from various outdoor locations was placed in bins and exhibited in the gallery alongside information about the site from which it had been collected. The concept of 'non-site' functions as the antithetical definition of site, but also complicates the notion of site by questioning the grounds for assuming its existence as a permanent, knowable, bounded whole. On his most famous project, the land art work *Spiral Jetty* (1970), Smithson writes eloquently:

As I looked at the site, it reverberated out to the horizons only to suggest an immobile cyclone while flickering light made the entire landscape appear to quake. A dormant earthquake spread into the fluttering stillness, into a spinning sensation without movement. This site was a rotary that enclosed itself in an immense roundness. From that gyrating space emerged the possibility of the Spiral Jetty. No ideas, no concepts, no systems, no structures, no abstractions could hold themselves together in the actuality of that evidence. My dialectics of site and nonsite whirled into an indeterminate state, where solid and liquid lost themselves in each other. It was as if the lake became the edge of the sun, a boiling curve, an explosion rising into a fiery prominence. Matter collapsing into the lake mirrored in the shape of a spiral. No sense wondering about classifications and categories, there were none.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Robert Smithson, 'The Spiral Jetty', in Lynne Cooke and Karen Kelly (eds), *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty* (New York, NY: Dia Arts Foundation, 2005), p. 8.

⁴¹ Miwon Kwon, *One Space After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

⁴² Smithson, 'A cinematic atopia', p. 139.

Smithson's work on sites and non-sites has contributed greatly to the process that Miwon Kwon describes as the 'unhinging' of site-specificity in contemporary art.⁴¹ His film work signposts the road not taken in the 1970s, and he himself comments on its relationship to structural film: 'After the "structural film" there is the sprawl of entropy. The monad of cinematic limits spills out into a state of stupefaction. We are faced with inventories of limbo.'⁴²

Although film may appear to be a minor element in Smithson's artistic output, George Baker has argued convincingly that what he calls 'the cinema model' is in fact a major conceptual component of his artistic project. In Baker's account, the chiastic form of the jetty – in which two spirals, one formed of earth and rocks, the other of water, mirror each other – is only the starting point in a series of linked and analogical figures. These are extended in the two works that accompany the land sculpture – a film and a written text – and in the unrealized project of an underground cinema cavern at a nearby site in which the film would be screened. Through montage, the film executes shifts of scale and leaps in time, presenting dumper trucks as dinosaurs and the jetty as a cosmological time machine. The construction of this metaphorical chain is made possible by the analogical relationship of the cinematic image to its referent: its likeness to, and lack of identity with, its object. The film is not a simple documentation or even reflection of the land sculpture, but

what Baker calls a ‘vectorization’. This is seen most clearly in its final sequence, shot from a circling helicopter following Smithson as he runs the length of the jetty, concluding with a dizzying metaphorical leap that connects the jetty, itself a rhyme with the spiral form of salt crystals, to the ‘spiral nebula’ of the sun and then to spiral reels of film on an editing machine in the film’s last image.

The cinema model, Baker claims, has become prevalent in contemporary art as a force that drives medium and aesthetic beyond themselves; a structural tool that realizes a contemporary concern with translating objects and events into new forms:

the cinema model emerges as something like a machine of the analogical in the digital era, a vast web of interconnections now experienced as a return of the repressed – of repressed continuities in the epoch of (digital) connection.⁴³

Even in the early 1970s Smithson regarded film as an archaic medium (‘One is transported by this Archeozoic medium into the earliest known geological eras’⁴⁴). In the ‘Spiral Jetty’ essay he describes the medium as a time machine capable of showing the prehistoric world as coextensive with our own, creating a cinematic universe across the sense of ‘cosmic rupture’ created by its disjunction from reality. The cinema model played an important role in enabling Smithson to reconceptualize sculpture, not as an art form of immediate physical presence but as one marked by a condition of absence. In taking up Smithson’s conception of the cinema as an analogical time machine, a machine not just for reanimating obsolete objects but also for generating anachronism and atopia (which Deleuze calls non-chronological time and any-space-whatever), Dean reopens the question of projection and the relationships it establishes between viewers and referential spaces outside the gallery.

Hal Foster describes Dean’s archival objects with their visions of failed futures as ‘found arks of lost moments in which the here-and-now of the work functions as a possible portal between an unfinished past and a reopened future’.⁴⁵ Critics have frequently noted that a clear rationale for Dean’s use of 16mm film is provided by the obsolescence of the medium in which Dean investigates these resonant objects, brought home by the inclusion within the exhibition space of the projector. This is often automated to show looped prints, saving labour but hastening their progressive destruction with each showing, pointing up film’s limitations as a recording medium that ultimately fails to preserve or even exactly to repeat what it records (though it is also true that damage incurred in projection is simply the continuing registration of time passing).

In his retrospective review of filmic ontology in the digital era, D. N. Rodowick proposes that the medium’s ‘powers of analogy are not those of representation or of a spatial mimesis, but rather of duration’.⁴⁶ Belying its superficial appearance as a window onto spatial alterity, the indexicality of the medium makes film a ‘spatial presentation of past

43 George Baker, ‘The cinema model’, in Cooke and Kelly (eds), *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty*, p. 108.

44 Smithson, ‘The Spiral Jetty’, p. 11.

45 Hal Foster, ‘An archival impulse’, *October*, no. 110 (2004), p. 15.

46 D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 73.

47 Ibid., p. 79.

48 Ibid., p. 82.

time'.⁴⁷ Developing his argument from Barthes's observations on photography, Rodowick claims that film augments photography's expression of past time to articulate 'not only the intuition of a past to which we remain connected through automated analogical causation, but also the anticipation of a future that will continually become the past'.⁴⁸ Like Rodowick, Dean is interested in what is revealed about the medium of film at the moment of its obsolescence. Her films are investigations of found objects and architectural structures that stand as tokens of past visions of futures that never came to pass and that, through entropic decay, are in the process of acquiring other meanings. In *Boots*, far from being incompatible – as Doane initially proposes they might be – deixis and trace are fused in the presentation of a space and time in which the qualities of alterity and anteriority are interchangeable, as if the past were a place one might visit.

Some of the screenings of *Boots* have extended its deictic dynamics by setting up analogies between the site of filming and the space (the gallery) and site (the location) of viewing, for example in the screenings at the landmark art deco building in London which houses the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Oporto which shares its grounds with the Casa Serralves. These not-quite site-specific locations render the analogical basis of the cinema model explicit: the work is screened in a place that is not the same as the one in the films but is in some way *like* it. Spatial analogy both repeats and negates the original location, pointing to its most significant difference from itself: the interval of time between recording and projection.

The spatiotemporal heterogeneity implied in Dean's work is more directly represented in Eija-Liisa Ahtila's six-screen high-definition digital video installation *Where is Where?* (2008).⁴⁹ The formal and thematic concerns of the work are consistent with those identified by Mieke Bal in an earlier project by Ahtila: 'What would storytelling be if the natural, normal, ordinary time of the Heideggerian subject is no longer valid?' and '*where, who is the subject*'.⁵⁰ As Ahtila's first major work with a setting outside Finland and with explicitly transnational subject matter, this piece develops the logic of her earlier work in a geopolitical direction.

The narrative concerns an event that took place in Algeria during the War of Independence, recounted by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* as one of a number of case histories of mental disorders induced by colonialism.⁵¹ Two boys aged thirteen and fourteen killed a friend, a *pied-noir* of their own age, in response to the massacre of forty men in the village of Meftah (named Rivet under colonial rule) in 1956. A second narrative strand, set in contemporary Finland, concerns a female poet searching for ways to engage imaginatively with the recounted events of another time and place. In voiceover she says:

When you are driving up a hill, how do you know nobody is coming towards you in the same lane? How can you know the others are driving

49 *Where is Where?* also exists as a single screen film, using splitscreen editing instead of multiscreen projection.

50 Mieke Bal, 'What if...? Exploring "unnaturality"', in Mieke Bal, Charles Green, Jeffrey Kastner and Kelly Gellatly, *World Rush: 4 Artists* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2003), p. 34.

51 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965).

on their own side of the road? How do you know this isn't that unexpected moment in time, when timelessness and time meet. A pause, a fit of absent-mindedness, a lapse into recollection. How can you know, when you step out of the door, that you are stepping into your own garden? Not into Meftah or Maroua? A second's inattention, disobedience, a half-guessed hint. And there are no distances, everything is the same side of the same and nobody knows where is where.

Through a partially realized staging of the events at Meftah, and through encounters with the hooded figure of Death costumed in the tradition of Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957) and with a female priest, the poet reimagines the events recounted by Fanon. Ahtila depicts this as an intermingling of two times and places, through the shuffling of images between the six screens and the migration of characters from one diegesis to another. The installation concludes with an enactment of the murder and a staging of the questioning of the two boys as transcribed by Fanon.

The six screens of the installation are used to create an enveloping but fragmented and unstable space. The first and last screens, placed by the entrance and exit, function as a prologue and an epilogue. The other four screens create a semi-enclosed square space within the gallery, a room within a room, within which multidimensional geometries of implied space and time operate. Spatial and temporal shifts are filtered through the representational conditions and conventions of a number of mediums and institutions – literature, cinema, theatre – as Ahtila explores not only the relationship between two historical moments but also the representability of those moments.

The installation begins with the poet, on a bare stage with boldly coloured flats, reciting a text to camera. The text, loosely adapted from Arthur Rimbaud's poem 'Enfance', is evocative and elliptical, suggesting partial and condensed images of half-remembered places. Ahtila preserves Rimbaud's combination of sensory immediacy with unrealistic imagery ('there are footprints abandoned in the bushes, or rolling along a path wrapped in ribbon'). In an interview, Ahtila describes one of her concerns in this work as how poetry can be made visible.⁵² Language features in the installation in a variety of ways, including a phrase in French which appears in shimmering gold light on one of the walls then moves across the space, passing through the poet (and, by implication, the viewer in the screening space). Death demands words from the poet, 'so you can construct this time after, by being in these words'. Ahtila's understanding of poetry echoes the view of writing expounded in the work of Maurice Blanchot, for whom Rimbaud and the Symbolists were important precursors. In Blanchot's writing, death is a recurrent figuration of the negativity of poetic language.⁵³

As a reference point, the choice of Rimbaud's 'Enfance' is significant both for the forceful sensory impact of its Symbolist aesthetics and for its exoticism, derived from what Fredric Jameson has termed the

52 Doris Krystoff, 'Eija-Liisa Ahtila: interview', in Eija-Liisa Ahtila et al., *Eija-Liisa Ahtila* (Paris: Hazan/Jeu de Paume, 2008), p. 177.

53 See Maurice Blanchot, 'Literature and the right to death', in *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandel (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 324.

⁵⁴ Fredric Jameson, 'Rimbaud and the spatial text', in *The Modernist Papers* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 242.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 240-41.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

⁵⁸ On structural unintelligibility and the subjectivity of the colonized, see Frantz Fanon's discussion of body schema and historical-racial schema in 'The lived experience of the black man', in *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2008), pp. 89-119.

'geographical Unconscious of colonialism'.⁵⁴ Jameson argues that Rimbaud's work is structured around two spatial poles of embodied experience: that of the adolescent, as 'a historically new and specific sensorium for which a host of unique determinants made this particular figure a privileged recording apparatus', and that – also new – of the global space of colonialism. Writing at a crucial moment in the transition from market capitalism to monopoly capitalism, Rimbaud registers 'a whole mutation in the world system'.⁵⁵ Rimbaud's spatial text responds to a gap between individual, phenomenological experience and structural intelligibility:

if, in the newly decentred situation of the imperialist network, you live something strongly and concretely, it is unintelligible, since its ultimate determinants lie outside your own field of experience. If, on the other hand, you are able to understand a phenomenon abstractly or scientifically, if your abstract mind is able to assemble all the appropriate determinants, present and absent as well, then this knowledge fails to add up to a concrete experience, remains abstract and sealed away in the compartment of the mind reserved for pure knowledge and reflection.⁵⁶

Rimbaud does not counter this historically original fragmentation with an imaginary wholeness, but works it through in imagery that combines vivid evocation of physical sensations with exotic locations, producing bodily experience as 'something like a registering machine or libidinal apparatus for capturing the peculiar resonances of the colonial world system'.⁵⁷ His exoticism, all the more projective for preceding his travels beyond the borders of Europe, is on a historical continuum with Fanon's anticolonialism, the one working from the microgeography of embodied experience to the global scale of new world systems, the other retracing the journey from the colonial system to a poetic phenomenology of the body.⁵⁸ What is provided by the installation's conjunction of the teenage poet Rimbaud and the teenage killers in Fanon's case history is a mirroring of the embodied experience of structural unintelligibility from both sides of a colonial divide and from both ends of the historical period of monopoly capitalism.

The translation of poetic negation and structural unintelligibility into moving images is conditioned by the fact that, unlike writing, the production of live-action moving images relies on the registration of actual spaces and times to generate signs. To render it in cinematic terms requires the mobilization of cinema's kinaesthetic power and the systematic disarticulation of the necessary spaces and times of production and reception. To achieve this, Ahtila draws on the strategies of art cinema, to which spatial and temporal indeterminacy are key. Diegetic space and time in the installation are organized by means of three-dimensional montage which forges relationships between screens synchronically as well as sequentially. Ahtila's editing strategies build on those of art cinema in that they generate ambiguity and uncertainty and combine

59 Chrissie Iles, 'Thinking in film: Eija-Liisa Ahtila in conversation', *Parkett*, no. 68 (2003), p. 59.

continuity with discontinuity. In an interview with Chrissie Iles, Ahtila talks about the importance of art cinema as an influence on her work, mentioning Godard and Bergman.⁵⁹

The principal function of montage in *Where is Where?* is to generate spatial connections and disjunctions – or, more accurately, disjunct connections – between three discrete locations: the poet's home in present-day Finland, wartime Algeria (represented by staged and archive footage), and a nonspecific theatrical space. Times and locations are interwoven in three ways: through a shuffling of the images on the four central screens, increasing the overall effect of spatiotemporal heterogeneity; through hybrid imagery, as in a sequence in which Algerian militias and French soldiers pursue each other through the poet's house in Finland, or when Death brings the boys across the sea to the poet's home in a rowing boat, which appears in a swimming pool in the poet's garden (figures 2 and 3); and finally through the interactions between the screens and across the space, as when shots fired in Algeria pierce the doors of the poet's study, and in doing so appear to cross the viewing space, prompting a brief involuntary reaction in the spectator. Even when a single location is presented more or less coherently on all four screens at once, there tend to be gaps, overlaps and shifts in scale rather than seamless continuity. The systematic play with continuity and discontinuity here is reminiscent of the formal systems of art cinema. David Bordwell's influential description of art cinema narration emphasizes permanent gaps in the *syuzhet*, multifaceted realities generated by the interplay of conflicting causal schemata and systematic ambiguity.⁶⁰ Deleuze's account of modern cinema or the cinema of the time-image (the corpus of which overlaps considerably with what Bordwell calls art cinema) centres on 'a method of film composition based on the *gap*, or the space *between* images'.⁶¹ By transposing the narrative strategies of art cinema to multiple screens, Ahtila widens this gap and positions the spectator inside it.

For the spectator standing between the screens, the bodily experience of the mimetic effects of cinema is intensified by proximity and by the dynamic organization of movement across the screens. Canted shots showing the two boys tumbling down a steep slope into the sand pit where they commit the murder, accompanied by loud electric guitar and raita music, communicate the characters' movement to the viewer. Sufi dancers are shown gyrating on all four screens at once but from different angles, so that motion is both coordinated and slightly out of joint, transmitting the disorienting effects of the spinning movement from dancer to spectator. Mimesis is also figured within the work, when, in response to the sound of engines droning overhead (motivated by archive footage of French war planes), the two boys run with outstretched arms, playing at aeroplanes. Crosscultural mimesis is troped as innocent but deadly misunderstanding, just as the murder mimics colonial violence.

The art cinema aesthetic of the installation is framed by two other cinematic forms: animation and documentary. The animated film that

60 David Bordwell, 'Art-cinema narration', in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1985).

61 Ronald Bogue, 'Gilles Deleuze', in Paisley Livingston and Carl R. Plantinga, *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 374.



Figs 2 and 3. *Where is Where?*
(Eija-Liisa Ahtila, 2008), 6-channel
projected HD installation with
8-channel sound, 53 mins, 43 secs.
Courtesy of Marian Goodman
Gallery, New York and Paris. ©
2008 Crystal Eye – Kristallisilmä Oy.

appears on the screen at the entrance to the installation presents an alternative expression of the installation's subject matter, cycling repeatedly through a sequence of images derived from the work: two separate land masses approaching each other, a road running over a hill, a clock running fast, a bird on a branch singing. The strong red colour of the animation resonates with the instruction Death gives to the poet to 'put some red in' and with the use of vivid reds throughout the mise-en-scene, especially in the deep red walls of the poet's home. The use of the colour red as a marker of transitional states and spaces has been noted in Ahtila's earlier work.⁶² Here it is associated with a poetic, almost metaphysical, distillation of the installation's themes, removed from specific place and time.

⁶² Taru Elfving, 'The girl', in Maria Hirvi (ed.), *Eija-Liisa Ahtila: Fantasized Persons and Taped Conversations* (Helsinki: Crystal Eye, 2002), pp. 209-13.

In counterpoint to this expressive imagery, the archive footage of the Algerian War included in the work functions as an indexical reminder of the actuality of the events that the installation mediates. The footage is mixed in with dramatized scenes, but not in a seamless way: the black-and-white images contrast markedly with the vivid colour of the other images, and the appearance of the archive imagery is underscored by a sombre musical theme. At one point the poet is briefly glimpsed surrounded by screens on which the archive footage is projected, in an installation within the installation. The final screen by the exit – the ‘epilogue’ – is used for the continuous (looped) projection of footage of corpses being laid out in the aftermath of a massacre. Hidden from the view of most spectators most of the time, yet continually present, the placement of these images mimics the place of the Algerian War in French life: an unspeakable violence buried in the national unconscious; a traumatic event that, unassimilated into consciousness, continues to happen. Through the inclusion of archive footage Ahtila registers the importance of actual historical and geographical location, while at the same time the installation’s spatial and temporal uncertainty emphasizes the ways in which the causes of the central event cross boundaries in space and its effects reverberate through time.

Ahtila uses theatrical deixis to literalize the question of where one *stands* in relation to events, just as Death tells the poet (and the spectator): ‘You stand in the wrong country assembling the pieces of a puzzle’. Theatrical staging is figured in the installation during several sequences in which stage scenery or theatre seats are shown. Ahtila explains this choice as follows: ‘A stage was an appropriate place for the events to emerge because a stage can be seen as a non-place, anonymous in itself, something that is built to make something else visible’.⁶³ Theatricality is manifested by the work at a deeper level in the way that spectators are required to synthesize their own understanding of events within the actual space and time of the gallery, and to do so from a range of complex and contradictory deictic cues pointing variously to the locations of the dramatized scenes in Algeria in 1956 and Finland in the present day, as well as to the theatrical space of the installation’s non-naturalistic stagings, the historical space of the archive footage and the real space of the gallery. The active engagement that this requires from the spectator is more typical of certain forms of theatre than of cinema or video. This is reinforced by the use of frontal staging and direct address for the recitation of the poem and the performance of a hymn. While not literally theatre – because performers and spectators do not exist within the same space – *Where is Where?* nevertheless invokes its deictic dynamics.

Where is Where? is a work about location and medium in the era of non-place and the post-medium condition. Through a series of explicit and historically specific remediations, it suggests both a lineage and a rationale for its aesthetics of dislocation. Implicitly acknowledging the status of multiscreen projection as a hybrid form rather than a medium in its own right, Ahtila investigates the ways in which location and

63 Krystoff, ‘Eija-Liisa Ahtila: interview’, p. 177.

dislocation can be suggested in each of the mediums that inform the work (after Krauss, this strategy might be termed differential remediation). Instead of being grounded in the specificity of a medium, the work tracks the impact of modernity across a number of mediums. Displacement and disorientation are understood as the effects of colonial and postcolonial modernity (Jameson's structural unintelligibility) but also as the necessary basis for empathy, as implied by the poet's question: 'How far can you enter into someone to understand them?' Rather than attempting to reinvent medium and place, Ahtila explores dislocation as a historical condition and a workable aesthetic.

Although the three works analyzed here have little else in common, they all evidence what I have called a deictic turn in recent gallery film and video installation. While this involves a renewed emphasis on the referential space within the frame, it in no way implies a straightforwardly illusionist aesthetic. On the contrary, deixis necessarily involves uncertainty. Gallery film and video installation is a hybrid form, situated between the institutions of cinema and the art gallery and anticipating new media practices. It registers its historical location between media forms and institutions in the intricacy and multiplicity of its spatial and temporal dynamics. While this deictic uncertainty may be seen as contributing to the dislocated condition of viewers, it can also be used in subtle and precise ways to address the complex situation of the contemporary subject in mediatized time and space.

Cultural problems of classical film theory: Béla Balázs, 'universal language' and the birth of national cinema

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- 1 See Noël Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 12–14; Robert Stam, *Film Theory: an Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 27.
- 2 Stam, *Film Theory*, p. 25.
- 3 Ibid., pp. 31–32.
- 4 See Richard Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory and Criticism 1907–1939*, Volumes I and II (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing About Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), esp. p. 9; Yuri Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception*, trans. Alan Bodger (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (eds), *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896–1939* (London: Routledge, 1988); Wolfgang Beilenhoff (ed.), *Poetika Kino: Theorie und Praxis des Films im russischen Formalismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2005); Anton

The heyday of classical film theory is predominantly understood to have been concerned with ontological and formal matters and with promoting film as an art.¹ Pursuing the shapes and contours of the new medium, many writers from the 1920s heralded cinema as an artistic Esperanto. These commentators invented a range of metaphors to describe film as a language or a universally intelligible form. Historians of film theory have characterized this response as ‘the celebration of film as a new “universal language”’.² Robert Stam, for instance, groups Vachel Lindsay, Ricciotto Canudo, Louis Delluc and Béla Balázs together as ‘universal language theorists’ who form a movement that anticipates Russian Formalism and 1960s film semiology.³

Lindsay, Canudo, Delluc and Balázs are but a smattering of writers from the era who saw cinema as a ‘universal language’.⁴ My intention, however, is not to provide a comprehensive inventory of all writers from this period who used the analogy of film as a language, but rather to suggest the different contexts under which these theories arose. While it is true that these national debates intersected with each other,⁵ it is imperative to cultivate a sensitivity to the varying cultural and historical specificity of each theorist’s argument. Although Sergei Eisenstein, Delluc and Lillian Gish may all have compared cinema to language at roughly the same time, the goals and audiences of their, and others’, writings might not fit neatly

Kaes, *Kino-Debatte: Texte zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Film 1909-1929* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1978); Sabine Hake, *The Cinema's Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany 1907-1933* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993); Lillian Gish, 'A universal language', in Antonia Lant (ed.), *Red Velvet Seat: Women's Writing on the First Fifty Years of Cinema* (London: Verso, 2006), pp. 200-202.

5 This is Marcus's claim in *The Tenth Muse*, p. 13.

under a common 'thesis'. For as strongly as the 'silent film theorists' champion the fledgling medium as an art and attribute to it an almost mystical power to unify heterogeneous cultures and classes, and for as much as the 1920s writers on film serve as cheerleaders for differentiating the medium from the other arts (or indeed, asserting its superiority), the cultural and historical impetus animating these discussions, their aesthetic emphases and modes of address, are vastly different.

By undertaking a close examination of just one version of the 'universal language thesis' by a single writer, Béla Balázs, I intend to complicate the entire enterprise. Tracing back the messy trail of reception and production and returning to the heart of Balázs's output, one finds a 'universal language' which is neither truly universal nor technically a language. Balázs's writings on cinema and language form the basis of a Janus-faced philosophy caught between future and past, film theory and human history, between an anthropology of the person and a prescription for various peoples. Reexamining Balázs and interrogating the 'universal language thesis' draws attention to the various modes, functions and addressees of what is called 'classical film theory' and to the need for new historiographical paradigms which take material matters of production and reception into account. At the same time, Balázs serves as an example for what unites many of the 1920s classical film theorists: tension between the universal and the nationally specific, and between proposed theories and implied histories of film.

Béla Balázs was a renaissance man of many creative and commercial interests and a European of shifting cultural and intellectual allegiances. He was born in 1884 as Herbert Bauer, the son of a Hungarian-German-Jewish couple, and spent his youth in Lőcse, Szeged and Budapest, going on to study in Berlin and Paris (with Henri Bergson). The young Bauer sought to be a professional writer and published his first poem at the age of sixteen, under the name Béla Balázs. Completing a doctorate in German literature (minoring in aesthetics and philosophy), he worked as a school teacher of German and then as a librarian. He converted from Judaism to Catholicism in 1913. After participating in the failed Communist revolution in Hungary, Balázs fled to Vienna in 1919. He wrote novels, poems, screenplays, fairytales and political essays, did translation work, and composed ballets, puppet shows and operas. He became Vienna's first film critic for a daily newspaper in 1922 and went on to report regularly on arts and culture in the city. Balázs later moved to Berlin, where his many engagements included adapting a screenplay from Bertolt Brecht and codirecting a film with Leni Riefenstahl, before moving to the Soviet Union. He spent most of the 1930s and the war years writing and lecturing in Moscow and, during the German invasion, outside the city and in Kazakhstan. Following World War II Balázs consulted on film productions in the GDR and Hungary and provided the screenplay for the landmark film *Valahol Európában/Somewhere in Europe* (1947). But Balázs was persona non grata in Hungary following

6 Balázs's biography is treated in Joseph Zuffa, *Béla Balázs: the Man and the Artist* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987); Helmut H. Diederichs, "'Ihr müßt erst etwas von guter Filmkunst verstehen': Béla Balázs als Filmtheoretiker und Medienpädagoge", in Béla Balázs, *Der sichtbare Mensch oder die Kultur des Films* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), pp. 115-47; Hanno Loewy, *Béla Balázs: Märchen, Ritual und Film* (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2003).

7 Béla Balázs, *Iskusstvo Kino* (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1945).

8 Zuffa, *Béla Balázs*, p. 323.

9 Béla Balázs, *Filmkultúra: A film művészeti filozófiája* (Budapest: Szikra Kiadó, 1948), and *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, trans. Edith Bone (London: Dennis Dobson, 1952).

10 Béla Balázs, *Béla Balázs's Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, ed. and trans. Erica Carter and Rodney Livingstone (Oxford: Berghahn, 2010). Unless otherwise specified, all references and quotations from *Visible Man* and *The Spirit of Film* are from this edition. Exceptional English-language assessments that take a larger body of Balázs's writings into account must be mentioned here: Hake, *The Cinema's Third Machine*, pp. 220-47; Getrud Koch, 'Béla Balázs: the physiognomy of things', trans. Miriam Hansen, *New German Critique*, no. 40 (1987), pp. 167-77. Erica Carter treats the problem of the English-language Balázs reception in 'Béla Balázs, *Visible Man*, or the Culture of Film (1924)', *Screen*, vol. 48, no. 1 (2007), pp. 91-95, as well as in her 'Notes on translation, glossary and abbreviations', in Balázs, *Béla Balázs's Early Film Theory*, p. ix.

11 *Visible Man*, pp. 3 ff.; see also *The Spirit of Film*, p. 97.

his return there in 1945, and suffered a hostile relationship with the Communist Party. He died in 1949, feeling humiliated and misunderstood in his native country.⁶

The example of Balázs is particularly appropriate to this exercise not only because he is the most prominent of the universal language theorists but because his use of language is an issue. Balázs's style is sometimes prolix, digressing into passionate paeans to Asta Nielsen's face or Charlie Chaplin's charm; often it is tantalizingly pithy. His subject matter ranges across aesthetics, fan mail, Marxism, vitalism, arcane theory and populist journalism, fable and sociology, self-promotion and advertisement, often incorporating several different concerns in a single paragraph or even sentence. Balázs treats cinema as popular culture, technical apparatus and art, praises artistic genius and follows the doctrine of materialist dialectics. His work is as subjective and speculative as the writings of François Truffaut and Jacques Rivette in mid-1950s *Cahiers du cinéma*.

Moreover, the reception of his work – in general, but particularly in anglophone scholarship – has been inflected by a problem of language. His German-language *Der sichtbare Mensch* appeared in 1924 and *Der Geist des Films* was first published in 1930. Balázs received the commission to write his third volume on film from the Soviet authorities in 1936. The Russian-language *Iskusstvo Kino* first appeared in 1945,⁷ but it was a 'badly translated and rudely abridged'⁸ compilation of *Der sichtbare Mensch* and *Der Geist des Films*, sitting alongside theoretical articles that had appeared in the Russian and German emigre press. In the last years of his life, Balázs 'corrected' *Iskusstvo Kino* into the Hungarian *Filmkultúra: A film művészeti filozófiája* (literally, 'Film culture: the art philosophy of film'), published in 1948, which was then translated into English in 1952 as *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*.⁹ The last was, until recently, the only major work available in English and hence the sole channel through which Balázs has been understood. It is only now, with the arrival of *Béla Balázs's Early Film Theory* – a new edition of *Der sichtbare Mensch* and *Der Geist des Films* – that anglophone scholarship is able to recuperate a Balázs lost in translation.¹⁰

Balázs's prodigious writing on film often subtly revises earlier versions of his material. Indeed, these revisions have major ramifications for how one might understand Balázs and his theories, and I shall return to these crucial distinctions later. But to avoid confusion, and the interventions of translators, editors, or Soviet and western censors that mark Balázs's later writings, it seems imperative to return to the author's earlier work for any discussion of his original formulations of the universal language.

In 1924 Balázs first systematized his theory of film as international language in *Der sichtbare Mensch*. This work, which Balázs claimed was the first theory of film,¹¹ heralded a visual culture revitalized in the age of the silent film. For Balázs, cinema reverses a historical trend begun with Gutenberg: 'The discovery of printing has gradually rendered the human face illegible. People have been able to glean so much from reading that

12 *Visible Man*, p. 9.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 10; cf. the subtly different, recycled version in *Theory of the Film*: 'Humanity is already learning the rich and colourful language of gesture, movement and facial expression. This is not a language of signs as a substitute for words, like the sign-language of the deaf-and-dumb – it is the visual means of communication, without intermediary of souls clothed in flesh [sic]. Man has again become visible.' *Theory of the Film*, p. 41.

15 *Visible Man*, p. 13.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

they could afford to neglect other forms of communication.¹² Bodies fell into disuse just as visual culture – epitomized in painting and sculpture but also in architecture – was undermined by a logocentric order. The culture of words, Balázs argues, is 'dematerialized, abstract and over-intellectualized; it degrades the human body to the status of a biological organism'.¹³ The invention of film has precipitated a general, revolutionary reinvigoration of visual culture, and with this revolution in expressive form comes a new direction in cultural perception. Cinema, according to Balázs, has ushered in a more direct and natural engagement with society than that offered by speech and script:

The whole of mankind is now busy relearning the long-forgotten language of gestures and facial expressions. This language is not the substitute for words characteristic of the sign language of the deaf and dumb, but the visual corollary of human souls immediately made flesh. *Man will become visible once again.*¹⁴

Balázs contemplates two opposing directions for the future of cinema. On the one hand, the language of physiognomy might multiply and increase the alienation and drifting apart 'that started with the confusion of tongues in the Tower of Babel'.¹⁵ It could lead to an individualization of culture and to loneliness. Although the process of Babel contributed to the consolidation of communities bound by a common vocabulary and grammar, Balázs sees facial expression as far more individual and personal than spoken language. Even though gesture has its 'traditions', it lacks the rules of a compulsory grammar; this language is 'still so young' and pliable.¹⁶ On the other hand, film promises the very 'salvation from the curse of Babel. For on the cinema screens of all countries, *the first international language* is developing: that of facial expressions and of gestures.' This development has economic roots, in that the costs of film production necessitate international distribution, which in turn requires that facial expression be equally comprehensible to all cultures. Balázs cites the struggle for hegemony between the 'Anglo-Saxon and French styles of expression' in cinema's earliest years, and how the laws of the market tolerated only one gestural language which could be understood 'from San Francisco to Smyrna' and by 'princesses and working girls alike'. 'Today', Balázs writes in 1924, 'film already speaks the only shared universal language'. Ethnographic and national specificities will henceforth only appear as cinematic ornaments and never more than 'psychological motifs'; the gestures that are critical to the course and the meaning of the plot must be internationally comprehensible for all languages. Because of the material imperative to recoup production costs in export markets, Balázs argues, cinema has normalized the language of gesture.¹⁷

This formulation of film and 'the visible man' is not without its contradictions. Balázs suggests that gestural language is ancient yet young, eternal yet evolving, universally comprehensible yet learned, common yet specific. The silent film will lead to more confusion and yet

save us from Babel. Most importantly, however, Balázs's deliberations on the ontological properties of this new medium are immediately wedded to sociocultural and industrial concerns, and in fact grow out of these histories.

In *Der sichtbare Mensch*, Balázs goes on to claim that 'modern philologists and historians of language' locate the origins of language in expressive movement and the language of gestures, 'the true mother tongue of mankind'.¹⁸ Clues as to who these 'modern' philosophers might be are not forthcoming, however. In fact his theory contradicts those proposed by C. S. Peirce, Ferdinand de Saussure, Martin Heidegger or Edward Sapir – to name just a few of the leading linguists or philosophers who were theorizing language in the first half of the twentieth century. Balázs's writings on universal language are, if anything, unmodern and out of fashion; they coincide historically with the field's transition from philology and historical linguistics to structural linguistics.

Although Balázs claimed to be the first film theorist, his work on cinema and language comes from a longer tradition of thinking and is hardly the stuff of 'modern philology and linguistic research': his theory of language and visual culture derives from the past. Historians of film theory have long proposed more or less suggestive genealogies for Balázs's thinking on this issue – via Viktor Shklovsky, Fritz Mauthner and others – but these do not always correspond to his ideas. Although Balázs sometimes uses the term *Fabel*, borrowed from the Russian Formalist idiom, he rejects that school's distinction between *fabula* and *sjuzhet*, most explicitly in a piece entitled 'Sujet und Fabel'.¹⁹ For Balázs, as Erica Carter writes, 'the essential substance of film is not its "banal", "abstract" or "superficial" empirical form, but the "inner life" that he believes is revealed in the physiognomy of film'.²⁰ Assenka Oksiloff, proposing Balázs as part of another tradition, correctly points out the anthropological preoccupations underscoring both Balázs's *Der sichtbare Mensch* and the *fin-de-siècle* Bohemian philosopher of language, Fritz Mauthner. However, Mauthner's belief that language's function is communicative and in no way epistemological is, as I shall show, directly opposed to Balázs's cinema theory. Mauthner, furthermore, explicitly repudiates the Balázian model of language's origins in an ancient, generally comprehensible system.²¹ Even Ernst Cassirer, whose similarities to Balázs in his folkloric appropriation of physiognomy are not inconsiderable, rejects the idea that gesturology is humanity's *Ursprache*.²²

In place of these traditions, I propose to elaborate on comparisons with the earlier utopian-affective theories of Giambattista Vico, Johann Georg Hamann and Johann Gottfried Herder. A sustained engagement with Herder in particular helps us to understand Balázs's thoughts on cinema and language, which may be classified into two interrelated categories: non-instrumentalism and anthropomorphization.

Balázs was by training a germanist (he wrote his doctoral dissertation on Friedrich Hebbel) and would have been familiar with Herder's work.

18 Ibid., pp. 10–11; cf. *Theory of the Film*, p. 41.

19 An unpublished manuscript from the archives of the Magyar Tudományos Akadémia (Hungarian Academy of Sciences), Budapest: MTA MS 5014/95.

20 Carter, 'Notes on translation, glossary and abbreviations', p. xi; cf. J. Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories: an Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

21 Assenka Oksiloff, *Picturing the Primitive: Visual Culture, Ethnography and Early German Cinema* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 141 ff.; cf. Gershon Weller, *Mauthner's Critique of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 86 ff.

22 Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: an Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (London: Milford, 1944), p. 76.

23 See Johann Gottfried Herder, 'Von den Lebensaltern einer Sprache', in Bernhard Suphan (ed.), *Sämtliche Werke*, Volume I (Hildesheim: Olms, 1967), p. 152, and *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1966), pp. 5-32.

24 Johann Gottfried Herder, 'Ueber den Fleiss in mehreren gelehrten Sprachen', in Suphan (ed.), *Sämtliche Werke*, Volume I, pp. 1-2.

25 Herder, 'Von den Lebensaltern einer Sprache', p. 153. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

26 Johann Gottfried Herder, *Johann Gottfried Herders Sprachphilosophie*, ed. Erich Heintel (Hamburg: Meiner, 1964), pp. 35-36.

27 F. M. Bamard, *Herder on Nationality, Humanity and History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), p. 13. Italics in original.

28 *The Spirit of Film*, pp. 154-55.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 133.

30 *Visible Man*, p. 51.

There are strong resonances between the ways in which Herder and Balázs approach language. Like Balázs, Herder finds the origins of language in sighs, primitive cries, gesture and the body rather than, as was then widely believed, a 'divine' language;²³ he stresses the universal nature of this original, affective language, which, he admits (less negatively than Balázs), became fragmented after the fall of the Tower of Babel.²⁴ Even when national spoken languages gradually began to supersede 'pantomime' or 'body and gesture', however, they retained their visuality: these early linguistic forms were 'pictorial', 'sensual' and 'rich in bold images'.²⁵ 'For what', asks Herder, 'was this first language but a collection of poetic elements? ... the natural language of all creatures ... a dictionary of the soul.'²⁶

More specifically, Herder shares with Balázs a non-instrumental view of language. Earlier philosophers of language such as Leibniz (and the latter-day linguists of the early twentieth century) considered language for its instrumental character, that is, in terms of its role as tool of reason or communication. For Herder, human nature and language are not linked by causality but by essence. Language is *the* ontological property of humanity, the essential, defining human characteristic. Linguistic description and appropriation of the world – whether by folklore, literature or public discourse – are, furthermore, the means by which 'things, ideas, and concepts are *humanized*'.²⁷

This irrational and emotional view of language helps us to understand what seems to be a major contradiction in Balázs's writings: although film is a universal language, it is not, and should not try to be, language. In a series of now notorious confrontations with Eisenstein's montage, Balázs rejects the Soviet director's attempts to synthesize 'speculative thinking and unconscious emotion' into 'intellectual cinema'.²⁸ In a polemical section entitled 'No ideograms, thank you!', Balázs takes Eisenstein's 'copulative hieroglyphics' metaphor to task: 'Images should not *signify* ideas; they should *give shape* to and *provoke* thoughts that then arise in us as inferences, rather than being already formulated in the image as symbols or ideograms'. Eisenstein's cinema of hieroglyphics, Balázs submits, is merely a throwback to the most primitive form of written symbols: 'a recourse to our own modern script [would be] surely of far greater use'.²⁹ Elsewhere Balázs scolds French abstract filmmaking for what he believes is its literal use of language. Such methods are 'a threat to the stylistic purity of film' because they are mere '*illustrated metaphors*': 'Instead of the irrational image of an irrational feeling we are given a *pictorial representation of a turn of phrase*'.³⁰ Although perhaps Balázs misrepresents the nuances of Eisenstein or the Surrealists, his agenda is clear. Film must not become merely a language used to translate abstract ideas into ready-made statements or effects; cinema, in other words, is not a tool of reason.

Film, following Herder's theory of language, is thus non-instrumental. Balázs is uninterested in dialogue as narratological device. Innovative exceptions, like Erich von Stroheim's turn as a ventriloquist in *Der grosse*

31 *The Spirit of Film*, p. 211.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 203.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 103.

34 See, for example, his sections on the closeup in *Visible Man*, pp. 37–42. Indeed, many of Balázs's observations here anticipate Siegfried Kracauer, 'Basic concepts', in *Theory of Film: the Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960).

35 *The Spirit of Film*, p. 174.

36 Herder, 'Ueber den Fleiss', p. 5.

37 For recent research on Herder as the father of modern anthropology, see John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

38 See, for example, Carter, 'Introduction', in Balázs, *Béla Balázs's Early Film Theory*, pp. xxv ff.

Gabbo/The Great Gabbo (1929), only prove the rule. In a typically playful formulation, Balázs writes that 'Gestural language is hindered by linguistic gesture';³¹ rather than the words of humans, the sound film should convey their sounds and create a 'spoken landscape'.³² Above all, Balázs sees the medium's 'linguistic' potential in the phenomenological rather than in the communicative relationship between screen and spectator. Film becomes 'its own special language', Balázs explains, 'through the close-up. Through the shot. Through the editing'.³³ These techniques are precisely those which, as Kracauer posits years later, allow cinema to reveal reality. The closeup, undoubtedly Balázs's privileged stylistic device,³⁴ furthermore allows an ambiguity that produces an active spectatorship. The 'absolute film', Balázs concludes, does not intend to 'represent an emotion but *stimulate it directly* in the spectator. The procedure here is actually one of suggestion'.³⁵ In other words (in another seeming contradiction), cinema's universality lies precisely in the way in which the medium allows for individual reception. Rather than see it as a tool of communication (as in Mauthner's conception of language), Balázs theorizes cinema as an avenue of experience.

This epistemological machine is, moreover, well equipped to delve into the workings of the human being. This theoretical move recalls Herder's anthropocentric, and more importantly *anthropomorphizing*, view of language. Herder holistically approaches epistemology, history, culture and language as inseparably *human* categories. For Herder language makes humans human, and its chief expression is in the individual national languages and dialects and their folk songs and folk literature. Early in his career, Herder advocated learning foreign languages and reading literature in the original as the key to understanding other cultures and their history. Through such efforts, Herder writes, 'I collect the spirit of each people in my soul!'.³⁶ Later he turned his attention to publishing and analyzing folk songs from countries such as Scotland, Latvia, Peru and Lapland. His psychological–philological investigations seek to show how the form of these texts arises from the anthropological origins of the culture's language and collective behaviour.³⁷ Folk art is deemed the collective expression of its people.

These thoughts strike a chord with *Der sichtbare Mensch*. For Balázs the silent film serves a function parallel to that of language in Herder's thinking. Cinema and its system of gesture and facial expression retrieve the humanity lost with the invention of the printing press and its aftermath. Film – like language in Herder's philosophy – redeems the ancient properties of human expression and is thereby an anthropomorphizing force. It returns humanity to the human.

The question of anthropomorphism leads naturally to Balázs's comments on physiognomy. Since previous commentators have singled out this feature of the author's theory for special regard, it is not necessary for me to perform an extended exegesis.³⁸ Nevertheless, it is imperative to rehearse the two parts to Balázs's notion of physiognomy. The first is the expressive physiognomy of the human face. This feature has led Helmut H. Diederichs

39 Urban Gad, *Filmen: dens midler og maal* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1919).

40 *Visible Man*, p. 13; cf. *Theory of the Film*, p. 44.

41 See Paul Ekman, *What the Face Reveals: Basic and Applied Studies of Spontaneous Expression Using the Facial Action Coding System (FACS)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); or Paul Ekman, *Emotions Revealed: Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004).

42 *Visible Man*, p. 13; cf. Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, p. 44.

43 *Visible Man*, p. 57.

44 *The Spirit of Film*, p. 121-22.

45 *Ibid.*, pp. 111, 113, 150, 153.

46 Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, p. 60.

to call Balázs's early theory 'actor's theory', part of a general trend that includes, for instance, Urban Gad's *Filmen: dens midler og maal* (literally, 'Film: its means and ends') from 1919.³⁹ Balázs's physiognomics pertains not only to a closeup examination of actors' faces, but also to a revelatory rediscovery of the human body through the mechanics of camera and film, activated by gesture and mime. The 'language of facial expression' is, according to Balázs, not necessarily universally decipherable, since 'the language of gestures is far more individual and personal than the language of words'.⁴⁰ This differentiates Balázsian physiognomics from, for instance, Charles Darwin's 1872 study, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, in which Darwin argues that emotions are systematically legible and can be mapped in the physiognomies of humans and animals. (Equally, Balázs's ideas differ from Paul Ekman's twenty-first-century physiognomics, which promise to reveal interviewees' true intentions and emotions to airport immigration officers.⁴¹) Balázs asserts the affective, irrational nature of emotion and how gesture 'lacks [the] strict and binding rules' that govern grammar, advocating a 'comparative "gesturology" on the model of comparative linguistics'.⁴²

Indeed, Balázs's theory of physiognomy extends beyond the human into a second area, a pansymbolic theory of a 'physiognomy of objects'. The decisive feature of film, Balázs argues in *Der sichtbare Mensch*, is its revelation that 'all objects, without exception, are necessarily symbolic. For, whether we are aware of it or not, all objects make a physiognomical impression upon us'.⁴³ Balázs develops this idea further in *Der Geist des Films*. Here he cites camera setups by which an 'overall scene' can be condensed into 'a single gesture': 'The image here does not simply register a particular event; more than this, the way the image is drawn, its particular nature, acts to achieve a particular effect'.⁴⁴ Montage can become a 'physiognomic mosaic' and film, properly made, can convey the face of a landscape or of a class: there can be a 'mass physiognomy' and 'mass gestures'.⁴⁵ In some secondary literature, this part of Balázs's physiognomics receives short shrift. This is attributable to the reformulation of these issues in the 1952 translation *Theory of the Film*. In that book, Balázs retreats from his earlier comments: 'What was more important, however, than the discovery of the physiognomy of things, was the discovery of the human face'.⁴⁶

There is an apparent tension in comparing Herder and Balázs. Herder's dwelling on national languages and dialects and his general celebration of pluralism would seem to be out of step with the Marxist Balázs's utopian prediction of the silent film's internationalizing features in *Der sichtbare Mensch*. The silent film, it should be remembered, erases national differences, which will in future serve only as ornament. In fact Balázs is by no means concerned only with humanity and its individual unit, the human being. There are profound ways in which Balázs's theory of cinema and the re-anthropomorphized person (*Mensch*) slips into a concern with the people (*Volk*). For example Balázs, like Herder, frames

47 *The Spirit of Film*, p. 220; cf. *Visible Man*, p. 4.

48 See Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: a Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 5, fn. 10.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 219.

his aesthetic theory around the idea of folk art. Near the end of *Der Geist des Films* he adamantly upholds cinema as a collective product. It is a *Volkskunst*, a 'people's art'.⁴⁷ So original and programmatic was Balázs's sentiment that Siegfried Kracauer, in his introduction to *From Caligari to Hitler*, referenced this section of *Der Geist des Films* as evidence for the argument that films are the collective product of a nation.⁴⁸ In a passage that very much anticipates Kracauer, Balázs writes: 'The spirit of film is, like the spirit of language, an object of "national psychology" [*Völkerpsychologie*] ... An ideological analysis of film would yield a cultural history of our times.'⁴⁹

One might argue that there are two distinct axes around which the word *Volk* has been traditionally defined. The first is 'a people' among other peoples, like the Germanic or the Celtic peoples, for instance. The second is 'the people' as opposed to the bourgeoisie or nobility. Although, generally speaking, Herder defines *Volkskunst* (folk art) along the first axis while Balázs often implies it to be of the second, there is a curious way in which Balázs's discourse on the 'people's art' slips into Herderian *Volkspoesie* (folk poetry).

Immediately following his comments on film as a collective product, Balázs notes that it seems to have been the 'general law' in matters of art that intellectual value and popularity maintain an inverse relationship. Indeed, it has always been a 'particularly German ideology' that good art and folk culture are mutually exclusive.

Where can we find in German literature the equivalent of Mark Twain, Kipling or Jack London? Writers who spin their tales in a universally accessible, ordinary language and yet are great artists? This art of the surface which is anything but superficial, this subtlety without finesse, this sensuous pleasure in objective reality, this charm of the light touch, this magic of a simple storytelling which eschews excessive intellectual complexity, and yet remains significant and poetic?⁵⁰

50 *Ibid.*, p. 221.

Until now, Balázs posits, German art has made 'concessions' when it has wanted to be popular. Chaplin, however, never resorts to banality in order to become 'universally comprehensible'. 'If the art of film wishes to survive', Balázs concludes, 'it must become popular [*volkstümlich*] not only at its lowest but also at its highest level.'⁵¹

51 *Ibid.*

In such passages, Balázs's Marxist use of *Volk* clearly drifts into Herder's cultural term. Why do we need a specifically German Chaplin, one might intuitively ask, if Chaplin is universally comprehensible and film is an international language? Elsewhere, Balázs is even more explicit: 'Chaplin's art is popular art [*Volkskunst*] in the best sense; it is comparable to the folk tales [*Volksmärchen*] of old. (Film has long since inherited the mantle of old folk poetry [*Volkspoesie*].)' Americans laugh at Chaplin because he is 'unpractical', Balázs continues, 'but America is not just a continent; it is a life principle that also prevails among us Europeans'.⁵²

52 *Visible Man*, p. 89; cf. Balázs's article on Chaplin from *Der Tag*, 8 December 1922, reprinted as Béla Balázs, 'Chaplin, or the American simpleton', trans. Russell Stockman, *October*, no. 115 (2006), pp. 53-54.

53 Johann Gottfried Herder, 'Auszug aus einem Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker', in Bernard Suphan (ed.), *Sämtliche Werke*, Volume V (Hildesheim: Olms, 1967), pp. 159-207.

54 Ibid., p. 159.

55 Ibid., p. 160 ff.

56 Johann Gottfried Herder, 'Ideen zur Philosophie der Menschheit', in Bernard Suphan (ed.), *Sämtliche Werke*, Volume XIII (Hildesheim: Olms, 1967), pp. 364-65. See also Carter, 'Introduction', p. xxvii.

57 Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, p. 107.

58 See Birgit Nübel with Beate Tröger, 'Herder in der Erziehung der NS-Zeit', in Jost Schneider (ed.), *Herder im 'Dritten Reich'* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 1994), pp. 51-73.

Balázs alludes here to Herder's famous essay on the Scottish folk poet Ossian, in which Herder precisely differentiates between *Volks poesie* and *Kunst poesie*.⁵³ Herder sees Ossian as a bard full of the 'innocence, simplicity, activity and bliss of the human life'⁵⁴ (much as Balázs sees Chaplin). In Herder's nationally and historically anchored aesthetics, folk poetry belongs first and foremost to its people and thus expresses aspects of the people's culture. Herder anticipates Balázs in his call for German writers – and indeed the intellectual literati of the *Kunst poesie* – to capture the spirit of these foreign folk songs 'of an uneducated, sensual people'.⁵⁵ In this instruction manual for what would become the *Sturm und Drang*, Herder anticipates Balázs's plea for a specifically German art, the popularity of which resides 'on the highest level'. Language, for Herder, is the point of departure for an aesthetic-affective understanding of 'nation'. Influenced by the contemporary works of Johann Kaspar Lavater, writings that would also (via Goethe) inform Balázs's 'physiognomy of objects', Herder calls for 'a general physiognomy of the nations from their languages'.⁵⁶ In a formulation that anticipates Balázs's 'visible man' almost word for word, Herder writes that, through language, 'the earthly inhabitant is becoming visible'.⁵⁷

Placing Balázs in dialogue with Herder and suggesting how slippery constellations of *Volk* (people) and *Mensch* (human being) recall a Herderian attendance to the national is in no way an attempt to characterize Balázs as a nationalist. (Nor does it revive Herder's scathing postwar reception, which read the author through the National Socialist abuse of his thoughts.⁵⁸) The two writers intersect: 'cinema', for Balázs, is in crucial ways what 'language' is for Herder; it is the force by which humanity becomes human. Furthermore, this comparison suggests ways in which Balázs's 'universal, international' film theory bleeds into 'national' film history and criticism.

For all of Balázs's emphasis on the international quality of the silent film, he is thoroughly preoccupied with national questions. This is particularly apparent in his use of examples, which function as a measure of revision between his various recycled publications. For instance, the English translation of *Filmkultúra* lacks the original volume's concluding chapter on Soviet films, which includes praise of Stalin. To illustrate how silent film revitalizes the human body, *Der sichtbare Mensch* cites 'American Realism' and the films of D. W. Griffith, Charlie Chaplin, Asta Nielsen, Harold Lloyd and Lillian Gish. Near the beginning of *Der Geist des Films*, which Balázs wrote after he moved to Berlin from Austria, he apologizes in advance, in a section programmatically entitled 'Why so few German examples?', for the few German and American instances and the relatively numerous Russian and French ones that follow. Indeed, Balázs deems it curious that, unlike France and Russia, Germany, 'the country of grand theory', produces so few artists who theorize on their practice. The apology is somewhat unnecessary: *Der Geist des Films* makes frequent mention of German and Austrian filmmakers such as Fritz Lang, Walter

Ruttman, Hans Richter, G. W. Pabst and Alfred Abel, the German actor who directed Balázs's screenplay *Narkose/Narcosis* (1929) (Balázs particularly liked to advertise his own films in his examples). Perhaps this concern with national cinema comes from Balázs's belief, articulated in his first article for *Der Tag*, that cinema is 'a matter of a nation's health'. In language that again anticipates postwar Kracauer, Balázs posits that 'from now on no one will be able to write a history of culture or national psychology without devoting a major chapter to the cinema. ... For the urban population of today, the cinema is what folk song and folktales used to be.'⁵⁹

In this 1922 article, Balázs is eager to establish an 'Austrian' film criticism, in much the same vein as he was later to look for a 'German' Charlie Chaplin. Balázs certainly subscribes to the 'torch' thesis of film history: the primacy of film culture in a certain nation of a certain period (Soviet montage, French Impressionism, and so on), an art historical methodology that Herder prominently employed.⁶⁰ On the last page of *Der Geist des Films*, Balázs attempts to explain the ascendancy of Russian national cinema, which in 'the absence of the most basic technical resources and utterly without experience' surpassed European and American cinema within five years. 'This cannot simply be ascribed to the greater talent of Russian directors', Balázs writes; it 'results from the fact that the prevailing spirit in Russia is not in conflict with the spirit of film.' 'The spirit of film', he concludes, 'is the spirit of progress.' This spirit has chosen film to be the 'art of the people'.⁶¹ These examples are in keeping with a 'functional' mode of writing about national cinema.⁶² In the words of Andrew Higson, this concept of national cinema 'is used prescriptively rather than descriptively, citing what *ought* to be the national cinema', rather than describing the actual film culture and experience of popular audiences.⁶³

Indeed, Balázs's theory of the international, universal human that would be the result of the silent film's reeducative spirit ends with a seemingly contradictory denouement. Balázs finishes his discussion of 'international language' in the chapter 'Der sichtbare Mensch' by concluding that film has distilled a 'normative psychology of the white race':

It contains the first living seeds of the standard white man who will one day emerge as the synthesis of the mix of different races and peoples. The cinematograph is a machine that in its own way will create a living, concrete internationalism: *the unique, shared psyche of the white man*. We can go further. By suggesting a uniform ideal of beauty as the universal goal of selective breeding, the film will help to produce a uniform type of the white race.⁶⁴

These claims about cinema's function vis-a-vis the white man (a passage tempered to a Marxist economics of cinematic markets and an 'international human type' in its reappearance in *Theory of the Film*⁶⁵) – and Balázs's entire preoccupation with the national – suggest a theory of

⁵⁹ From Balázs's first article for *Der Tag*, 1 December 1922; reprinted as Béla Balázs, 'Film Criticism!', trans. Russell Stockman, *October*, no. 115 (2006), p. 56.

⁶⁰ Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, p. 120.

⁶¹ *The Spirit of Film*, p. 238.

⁶² See Jinhee Choi, 'National cinema, the very idea', in Noël Carroll and Jinhee Choi (eds), *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 310–19.

⁶³ Andrew Higson, 'The concept of national cinema', *Screen*, vol. 30, no. 4 (1989), p. 37.

⁶⁴ *Visible Man*, p. 14.

⁶⁵ cf. Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, p. 45. See also Carter, 'Introduction', pp. xxxvii–xxxviii.

cinema more universal for some than for others. Balázs's universal language seeks less to encourage internationality than to create a single nation. Nevertheless, one must not set up an easy opposition between the national and the international, nor conclude that Balázs's concern with the national somehow negates his utopian internationalism. Rather, the curious tension between the national and international in Balázs poses larger questions about the objectives and modes of address of early film theory.

Classical film theory's dirty little secret is that the idea of national cinema is born in the universal language thesis. In writings on film from the late 1910s and 1920s, questions of cinematic ontology, as set out in the universal language discourse, are inextricably bound to questions of nationhood. For all of Balázs's Marxist rhetoric in *Der Geist des Films*, a plea for a 'German' Charlie Chaplin or Mark Twain is just one example of how 'classical film theory' is part of messy discourse that was a springboard for – and animated by – a prescriptive critique of one's own national cinema. This principle is true of the most prominent and canonical film theorists of the period, without mentioning explicitly nationalist writers like Walter Bloem, 'lesser' figures like Rudolf Kurtz, or expressly sociological studies such as Emilie Altenloh's *Zur Soziologie des Kino*.⁶⁶

If we take this principle to heart we should not be surprised by the case of the French film director, screenwriter and critic Louis Delluc. As already noted, Stam and others identify Delluc as one of the chief proponents of the universal language thesis. Reflecting on visits to cinemas in both working-class and middle-class neighbourhoods, Delluc praises film's ability to democratize. Its 'miraculous' power is that it 'touches the unanimity of the masses without demanding the cerebral preparation of a book or music'.⁶⁷ The 'fifth art' (in Delluc's idiom) bridges the boundaries of language; it has the potential even to unite warring nations:

The semicircle in which the cinema spectators are brought together encompasses the whole world. The most separated and diverse human beings attend the same film at the same time throughout the hemispheres. Isn't that magnificent? A hero can move many millions of people who neither know nor understand one another, who may even be attacking and slaughtering one another.⁶⁸

At the same time, Kristin Thompson has identified Delluc's early writings on film (in particular his review of Victor Sjöström's *Berg-Ejvind och hans hustru/The Outlaw and His Wife* [1918]) as perhaps the first to recognize individual national cinemas as having a particular stylistics.⁶⁹ Indeed, in spite of Delluc's writings on the universal nature of the cinema, he holds a nationalist, if not an imperialist, understanding of the film industry:

⁶⁶ For more information on these writers, see Hake, *The Cinema's Third Machine*, pp. 45, 122–23, 145 ff.

⁶⁷ Louis Delluc, 'The crowd', trans. Richard Abel, in Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory and Criticism 1907–1939*, Volume I, p. 162.

⁶⁸ Louis Delluc, 'From Orestes to Rio Jim', trans. Richard Abel, in *ibid.*, p. 257.

⁶⁹ Kristin Thompson, 'The international exploration of cinematic expressivity', in Lee Grieveson and Peter Krämer (eds), *The Silent Cinema Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 268–69.

[French distributors'] ambition and their commerce have spread French culture throughout the world – without which this special branch of *business* would have succumbed – thanks to works like *La Roue*, *El Dorado*, *L'Ombre déchirée*.⁷⁰

When a particular film or genre is successful, the entire nation deserves credit; thus for the Western, 'it is to the Americans that we owe this miracle'.⁷¹ This idea of film's 'national production' contrasts with Delluc's authorial understanding of theatre and opera. In those arts, it is clear to Delluc, 'Aeschylus created *Prometheus*, as Shakespeare created *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, as Wagner created *Parsifal*'.⁷²

Invoking another canonical universal language theorist, Ricciotto Canudo, we find a continuation of this pattern. While Canudo's theory of film explicitly posits cinema as a 'universal language' and a 'new poetic language',⁷³ his history of film implies exactly the opposite. Canudo presents film history as a battle of competing national drives. Based on the flourish of its opening paragraph, 'Reflections on the seventh art' might be considered as a squib delivered to waken France's somnolent national cinema:

I have said that the expressive domains of cinema remain basically unexplored. At least in France. A most painful qualification, given that France has unleashed all the fire of modern poetry for the last fifty years. In France the visual arts have sought new alchemies of color and form; in France music has been exploring the new harmonic magic of sounds. In France the cinema first took flight, hatched from scientific and industrial research. There is less awareness in France than anywhere else that the cinema is an art which must not resemble any other.⁷⁴

In fact Canudo's 'universal language' *should* express national characteristics; this is its fundamental essence: 'Cinema will thereby prove to be the supreme artistic means of representation and expression of milieus and peoples'. This distinguishes theatre, which he posits can only represent individual psychology, from cinema: 'Action in – only in – the cinema should be nothing more than a corporeal detail, a material consequence, a visual expression of a collective psychology'.⁷⁵

Although Canudo (like Balázs in *Der sichtbare Mensch*) uses the future tense in most of his essay, predicting where this infant medium might lead, his examples suggest that cinemas of collective national psychologies were already a reality. Referring presumably to the Svenska Biografteatern pictures of the 1910s by filmmakers such as Georg af Klercker, Mauritz Stiller and Victor Sjöström, Canudo notes that 'The Swedes brought to cinema's evocation of the human drama, with incomparable mastery, an element of ideal counterpoint, inaccessible to theater: the ambience of *nature* (a character as important as *Destiny*)'.⁷⁶ These are 'the Swedes, whose vision acquires emotional profundity in their snowscapes'.⁷⁷ For Canudo, the setting's mood must determine the

70 Louis Delluc, 'Prologue', trans. Richard Abel, in Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory and Criticism 1907-1939*, Volume I, p. 288.

71 Delluc, 'From Orestes to Rio Jim', p. 256.

72 Ibid., p. 258.

73 See Giovanni Dotoli, 'Proposte di Ricciotto Canudo per un nuovo linguaggio poetico', in Giovanni Dotoli (ed.), *Lo scrittore totale: Saggi su Ricciotto Canudo* (Fasano: Schena, 1986), pp. 79-95.

74 See Ricciotto Canudo, 'Reflections on the seventh art', trans. Claudia Gorbman, in Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory and Criticism 1907-1939*, Volume I, p. 291.

75 Ibid., p. 292.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid., p. 299.

78 Ibid., pp. 292, 294.

79 Ibid., p. 299.

80 Ibid., p. 297.

81 See, for example, Canudo, 'Le Film Latin', *Semaine Cinématographie*, March 1921 and 'Une maison de "Films Latins"', *La Revue de l'Époque*, February 1922, as well as his collection of essays, *L'usine aux images* (1926) (Paris: Séguiér, 1995).

82 Duncan Petrie, 'Paul Rotha and film theory', in Duncan Petrie and Robert Kruger (eds.), *A Paul Rotha Reader* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), p. 53; cf. Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, p. 370.

83 See Malcolm Turvey, 'Balázs, realist or modernist?', *October*, no. 115 (2006), pp. 77–87, and *Doubting Vision: Film and the Revelationist Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Thomas Elsaesser, 'Cinema – the irresponsible signifier or "the gamble with history": film theory or cinema theory', *New German Critique*, no. 40 (1987), pp. 65–89.

course of events in cinema, and this mood is undoubtedly a national affair. Whether 'natural like the Swedes' or 'powerfully artificial like in some German films', film style and genre express national characteristics. Americans make Westerns and 'Italians assemble great numbers of people in front of the camera'.⁷⁸ Nation, for Canudo, can imply an aesthetic or a genre, while cinematographic truth means the filmmaker expressing the 'soul' of a nation 'with details reflecting his visionary precision, if not documentary truth'.⁷⁹ If the 'undeniable and – alas – increasing inferiority of French films when compared to other countries' production resides primarily in their ignorance of cinematic truth', then one might conclude that Canudo's problem with French cinema is its failure to express its national subconscious.⁸⁰ Indeed, Canudo was a champion of the idea of 'Latinité' in his fiction and nonfiction writings and in his function as vice president of the Union of Mediterranean Races. His thoughts on 'Oriental Films' and a 'Mediterranean' or 'Latin' cinema are key, early – and often forgotten – articulations of the idea of national cinema.⁸¹

The loudest proponents of film as a universal language are also the fathers of national cinema. The prescriptions by Balázs, Delluc, Canudo and others must be seen in line with – and as anticipating – the histories of film which emerged in the 1930s and 1940s and revolved along nationalist axes: Léon Moussinac's *Naissance du cinéma* (1925), Paul Rotha's *The Film Till Now* (first published in 1930) and *Documentary Film* (1936), Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach's *Histoire du cinéma* (1935), Georges Sadoul's *Histoire générale du cinéma* (1946) and Jerzy Toeplitz's *Historia sztuki filmowej* (1955), plus the classical German film histories, Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947) and Lotte Eisner's *The Haunted Screen* (1952). Before the first canonical national film histories, in which historians saw cinema as the expression of national spirit, ontological appraisals of the new 'universal' art implied film was an expression of national characteristics.

Duncan Petrie has argued that Rotha's film histories should be seen as film theory, in that the ontological project in his volumes shares common ground with Münsterberg, Pudovkin, Eisenstein, Delluc, Epstein, Balázs and Arnheim.⁸² I would add that the reverse is also true. Examining Balázs and other universal language theorists from the 1920s, one sees that sophisticated writing on film from the so-called classical era confounds our present boundaries between theory and history, formal contours and national borders.

In dealing with classical film theory it is important to remain aware of the many questions to which these thinkers are responding; the 'classical film theorists' were often cheerleaders for a new medium, concerned with legitimizing its value for study. One such set of questions, which Noël Carroll, Dudley Andrew, Thomas Elsaesser and others have formulated and upon which Malcolm Turvey has most recently elaborated, concerns film's transformation of the profilmic event, which also pertains to 'modernist' matters such as how the intervention of cinema changes human perception – what Turvey dubs the 'revelationist' tradition.⁸³ These

reckonings suggest that Balázs is a thinker situated between the rigid fronts of formalism and realism, and they link him with, for instance, Kracauer's Weimar essays and *Theory of Film*. Nevertheless, it is necessary to see Balázs in line not only with the Weimar film critic and the 'realist' writer of *Theory of Film* – who famously wrote of cinema as 'the Esperanto of the eye' – but also with the symptomatic-nationalist film historian of *From Caligari to Hitler*. I propose that we consider Balázs less as a mere 'silent film theorist' and more as a cultural anthropologist who approaches cinema *through* the human being; whether it be through 'the subjective personality of the artist', formulated in his late work *Theory of the Film*,⁸⁴ the various blurrings of the archetypal *Mensch* in his volume from 1924 or the constellations of the German people from *Der Geist des Films*. Neither pure film theory, silent film theory nor actor's theory, *Der sichtbare Mensch* is instead an anthropological instruction manual for a revelatory recuperation of humanity through cinema.

This is not merely a question of expanding our list of Balázsian preoccupations. How we view the entire project also affects how we are to understand even the better-known writings. That Balázs sees a search for a new race based on the psyche of the white man as one of cinema's main goals must surely affect how we are to consider his thoughts on the closeup or the relationship between projected film and profilmic phenomena. Defining cinema as the wilful expression of class, nation and humanity is also an ontological concern. The case of Balázs is fascinating in this regard, as his 'own' national cinema changed with his migrations from Hungary and Vienna to Berlin and Moscow. His biography is marked by struggles between patriotism and Marxist internationalism: several of his fiction pieces revolve around this theme.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, Balázs is not exceptional in this regard. One need only look to Canudo or Kracauer to find similar examples of national transference.

What we read of Balázs determines *how* we read him. For instance, limiting our examination to *Theory of the Film* would explain those anglophone interpreters who seek to yoke Balázs with Rudolf Arnheim under the sign of the 'silent-film paradigm'.⁸⁶ In the English version of *Theory of the Film*, Balázs appears to eulogize the silent film. He changes to the past tense at the very end of the book's fifth chapter, a section which summarizes and subtly revises passages written in the present or future tense in *Der sichtbare Mensch*. In this passage's original form, Balázs looks ahead to the silent film as the utopian force which will bind humanity together. The theorist's inflected recapitulation from the late 1940s seems to make a melancholy assessment of film as a universal language since, like Arnheim and his revisions of *Film as Art*,⁸⁷ Balázs's turn to the past tense seems to romanticize the silent film as a more perfect form. If one reads only *Theory of the Film*, Balázs seems explicit about the missed opportunity for silent film to create a universal language beyond national barriers: 'The art of reading faces *was about to become* the very useful property of the masses, thanks to silent film'.⁸⁸ This turn to the past tense is already present in its first reworked form, *Der Geist des Films*.

84 Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, p. 86.

85 See Zsuffa, *Béla Balázs*, pp. 86, 113.

86 See, for example, Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory*, pp. 7–8. This view has been promoted as recently as Turvey, *Doubting Vision*, p. 37.

87 The core of *Film as Art* was Arnheim's 1933 German-language volume, *Film als Kunst*, which appeared in English under the title *Film*. See Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1957), *Film als Kunst* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2002), and *Film*, trans. L. M. Sieveking and Ian F. D. Morrow (London: Faber and Faber, 1933).

88 Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, p. 75. My emphasis.

89 *The Spirit of Film*, p. 192.

90 *Ibid.*

91 *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

92 *Ibid.*, p. 193.

However, in that volume the passage is followed by a section called 'First the Spoon and Then the Soup', in which Balázs proclaims the technical innovation of sound film to be a creative 'muse': 'Technical innovation is the most effective inspiration'.⁸⁹

The idea that Balázs sees the advent of sound film as a tragic fall – repeated by generations of scholars who have dubbed Balázs a 'silent film theorist' in the same vein as Arnheim – is not representative of the course of the writer's work. While admitting the dangers that the sound film, if it develops incorrectly, may pose to the visual culture recuperated by the silent film,⁹⁰ Balázs sees great potential in the form by the time *Der Geist des Films* is published. Whereas *Der sichtbare Mensch* had been a 'pretheory', *Der Geist des Films* is, according to the author, the 'posttheory' that the sound film demands. In an analogy repeated frequently throughout his work, Balázs writes, 'only philistines turn up their noses and weep and wail, instead of jumping in and taking part. New theories open up new vistas for new voyages of Columbus'; the sound film is 'the new language'.⁹¹ In fact, Balázs develops a complex utopian theory of sound in *Der Geist des Films* that rivals the contemporaneous writings on asynchronous sound by Eisenstein and Pudovkin. Just as the silent film helped to recuperate the microdynamics of the physiognomy of the world, Balázs proposes that 'the sound film will now uncover ... our acoustic environment. The voices of objects, the intimate language of nature.' It promises the 'salvation from the chaos of noise'.⁹² Balázs follows his argument for the silent film from *Der sichtbare Mensch* so closely that he pleads for a 'sound closeup'. It should be remembered, moreover, that Balázs wrote treatments, doctored scripts and composed screenplays for scores of sound films from 1930 until his death. These comments and this work are hardly those of an Arnheim or a 'silent film theorist'.

There is an argument to be made that the critical discourse of a universal language thesis depends on a retrospective misreading, at least in the case of Balázs. In other words, those historians who have yoked Balázs to a 'universalist' 1920s (silent) film theory have come to this conclusion by reading *Theory of the Film*, his much more internationalist revision from 1948, rather than examining the material he actually published in the interwar years. For this reason, a thorough assessment of Balázs must take into account his larger corpus rather than the poor translation of a book Balázs cobbled together on his humiliating return to Hungary after long years of exile. *Theory of the Film* may be Balázs's last book, but it is not the final expression of his thinking. Rather than the systematic conclusions of an academic with a secure, leisurely existence (and this differentiates Balázs markedly from Professor Münsterberg and much of Arnheim's later writing, for instance), the bulk of this work came paraphrased through reviews written for daily newspapers in the course of a freelance existence.

In sum, the messy course of production, editing, translation and reception calls for a philological approach to Balázs. The absence of such

93 Diederichs, "Ihr müßt erst etwas von guter Filmkunst verstehen", p. 118; Zsuffa, *Béla Balázs*, p. 317.

a methodology is especially ironic, since his writings themselves deal with the history of language; in another professional echo of Herder, Balázs collected Hungarian folk songs with Béla Bartók and later wrote a foreword to an anthology of Kazakh folk poetry.⁹³ The more fashionable theorists of the period, such as Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, have enjoyed a rigorous philological treatment: no serious study of their work ignores its conditions of production. Balázs has long deserved the careful assessment provided by Erica Carter's new introduction. This translation of Balázs's first two German-language books into English will surely occasion a wider reexamination of his corpus, and points to the need for greater consideration of matters of form and reception in the history of film theory more generally.

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Practical melodrama: from recognition to action in Tahmineh Milani's Fereshteh trilogy

MICHELLE LANGFORD

Towards the end of Iranian filmmaker Tahmineh Milani's *Do zan/Two Women* (1999), the narrative reaches its highly melodramatic climax in which the central female character, Fereshteh (Niki Karimi), finally confronts the man who has been stalking her for many years, Hassan (Mohammad Reza Forutan). After a chase through a series of alleyways, Fereshteh collapses to the ground and Hassan hovers over her threateningly with a knife. He begins to speak, blaming her for not allowing him to fulfil his 'duty' as a man: 'You destroyed me. I wanted to marry you; you didn't let me. I wanted to make you happy; you didn't let me. I wanted to be your man; you didn't let me. I wanted to do right; you didn't let me.' But Fereshteh hits back, listing all the ways in which he has severely limited *her* potential: 'I wanted to study; you didn't let me. I wanted to make something of myself; you didn't let me. I wanted to help my family; you didn't let me. I wanted to live; you didn't let me.' At this point, and as her voice becomes more desperate, her address opens out from the particular to the general: 'None of you let me, not you, not my father, not my husband. What are you waiting for? Finish the job. I've had it with a lifetime of threats, insults, humiliation.' The desperation and despair in her voice rise further, complemented by the swelling of melodramatic music as her husband approaches, carrying a metal bar. Fereshteh continues: 'What are you waiting for? I can't take it anymore, I can't ...' Her voice trails off as she begins to sob; her husband Ahmad (Atila Pesiani) hits Hassan with the metal bar; a struggle ensues; the music

reaches a climactic pitch and, as Hassan stabs Ahmad, the image cuts away to Fereshteh's distraught face. As she slowly drops back to the ground, the film cuts to the next scene, leaving the viewer in suspense as to the outcome.

There is no doubt that this scene is orchestrated for high melodramatic effect, provoking pathos by exposing the true thoughts and feelings of characters around whose tense relationship the film's central emotional conflict has revolved, then bringing in the husband to effect a last-minute rescue, a common device of melodrama. But I would argue that there is more going on than the playing out of conventional melodramatic tropes of emotional revelation and rescue. In this scene, as throughout the film, the melodramatic is deployed as a practical strategy for showing how the private sphere of women in Iran has been deeply affected by wider public and political events – namely the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79 and its aftermath. This argument may be expanded to encompass all three of Milani's films that are commonly known as the Fereshteh trilogy: *Two Women*, *Nimeh-ye penhan/The Hidden Half* (2001) and *Vakonesh-e panjom/The Fifth Reaction* (2003). The films, all starring prominent Iranian actress Niki Karimi in the leading role, tell the stories of similar but distinct women who share the name Fereshteh ('angel' in Farsi). Rather than limiting the stories to the representation of a single individual, the trilogy produces an emblematic, collective and multiple sense of the issues facing women in the post-Revolutionary period. An analysis of the melodramatic strategies reveals how the three films work together to form a complex allegory of women's experience, and their struggle for social mobility and public visibility in Iran.

As one of Iran's most prominent women filmmakers, Tahmineh Milani is frequently described as a 'feminist' as a result of her career-long interest in depicting women's stories. However, to be described as feminist in the Islamic Republic of Iran is problematic. Many Iranian women's rights activists eschew the label, primarily because in the Iranian context the term is inextricably linked with western ideology. According to Nima Naghibi, Iran's ruling elite during the Revolutionary period argued that 'feminism was a Western phenomenon and that all feminist activity in Iran would be perceived as "counter-revolutionary" behaviour. Iranian feminists were thus forced to choose between the false binary of the West vs. Iran.'¹ Despite this tension, many secular women have begun to describe themselves as feminist and, as Valentine Moghadam has argued, even those who reject the label nevertheless 'engage with transnational feminism'.² Iran does have a long history of women's movements, both religious and secular, and women have played important roles both in the Constitutional Revolution (1905-11) and the Islamic Revolution (1978-79).³ Right up to the present day these movements have focused mainly on the practical issues regarding the status and rights of women in Iranian society rather than taking the more conceptual and ideological path of western feminism. Many of these practical issues highlight the

- 1 Nima Naghibi, 'Five minutes of silence: voices of Iranian feminists in the postrevolutionary age', in Rowland Smith (ed.), *Postcolonising the Commonwealth: Studies in Literature and Culture* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000), p. 136.
- 2 Valentine M. Moghadam, 'Islamic feminism and its discontents: toward a resolution of the debate', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 27, no. 4 (2002), p. 1164.
- 3 There is now a plethora of writing on the history and theory of Iranian feminism and women's activism. In addition to texts cited, some of the most useful texts that have informed this essay are: Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Mahnaz Afkhami and Erika Friedl (eds), *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-Revolutionary Iran* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1994); Valentine M. Moghadam, *Modernising Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993).

contradictions of being a woman in Iran, where high numbers of women actively participate in the workforce (including the film industry) and in education but lack equality in some of the most fundamental areas of human existence, such as marriage, divorce, child custody, polygamy and giving legal testimony. Milani's films take up many of these issues, using the melodramatic as a practical strategy not simply to generate pathos but to analyze in dramatic form some of the social and political factors that inhibit changes in the legal, political and social status of women in Iran. Many of the generic and textual features of melodrama in Milani's films serve to produce recognition, and develop an analysis, of such problems. Across the trilogy, and particularly in the third film, they also seek to imagine the kinds of actions that might follow from such practices of recognition and analysis.

Since Iranian films burst onto the world cinema scene in the late 1980s, this 'new' national cinema has been the subject of many volumes of scholarship. The majority of these studies, however, have focused on the wave of 'art films' – often referred to in terms of 'poetic realism' – and a handful of prominent male directors. Unlike the wealth of scholarship on melodrama and action as the dominant generic modalities in the world cinemas from India, Hong Kong, Mexico or Egypt, for example, little is known about the generic and textual practices employed by Iran's vibrant commercial cinema, which is dominated by genre films, many of which fit into one or more subcategories of melodrama.⁴ Melodrama and genre films more generally constitute a significantly underexamined aspect of Iranian cinema. This may be attributed to a number of factors, such as the lingering pejorative connotations attached to melodrama and the lack of representation in international distribution caused by the technical inferiority and local specificity of many of these films. But also of relevance is the dominance within Iranian cinema scholarship of researchers trained in anthropology or social history, which has led to an emphasis on sociological and thematic interpretation rather than detailed textual analysis based on film studies methodologies. Milani's films serve as an ideal place to begin to redress this balance as she has managed to straddle an apparent divide between art and commerce, achieving commercial success at home while also breaking through to the international art cinema circuit.

This essay is an attempt to address the absence of film studies scholarship on popular Iranian cinema and to contribute more broadly to scholarship on world cinema, by situating Milani's strategic deployment of melodrama within international theoretical and feminist debates on film melodrama and by developing analysis in light of the very particular context (post-Revolutionary Iran) in which they were made. I shall show how Milani's 'practical application' of the 'theoretical concept' of melodrama as 'woman's film' aligns closely with the practical aims of Iranian women's movements. It is just such an emphasis on 'practical theory' that Julianne Burton identifies in the work of so-called

4 For a brief history of melodrama in Iranian cinema, see Solhjoo Tahmasb, 'Melodrama: the main genre in the Iranian cinema', *Film International: Iranian Film Quarterly*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1999), pp. 49-52.

5 Julianne Burton, 'Marginal cinemas and mainstream critical theory', *Screen*, vol. 26, nos 3-4 (1985), p. 3.

6 Thomas Elsaesser, 'Tales of sound and fury: observations on the family melodrama', in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), p. 45. Elsaesser's essay was first published in 1972.

7 Linda Williams, 'Melodrama revised', in Nick Browne (ed.), *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), p. 42.

8 Linda Williams provides an excellent summary and review of this debate, in which she was a key player in the introduction to her chapter 'Melodrama revised', pp. 42-51.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

10 Christine Gledhill, 'Dialogue: Christine Gledhill on *Stella Dallas* and feminist film theory', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 25, no. 4 (1986), pp. 44-48.

'oppositional' third world filmmakers in her groundbreaking essay published in *Screen* in 1985. Burton paved the way for the appropriate application of mainstream film theory to marginalized film practice, and it is with her work in mind that I now attempt to bridge a similar 'cultural-critical divide'.⁵

The study of melodrama underwent its own revolution during the 1970s, when scholars sought to redeem it from the largely pejorative connotations commonly associated with the mode's emphasis on 'excessive' emotionality. Initially this redemption took the form of examining film melodrama as an extension of earlier stage and literary traditions which, according to Thomas Elsaesser, thrive 'during periods of intense social and ideological crisis'.⁶ Elsaesser argues that numerous auteurs of Hollywood cinema used the very emotional excesses of the genre to smuggle a critique of 1950s US society into their films. This was achieved primarily through one of the major characteristics of the genre, whereby, according to Linda Williams, we are moved 'to pathos for protagonists beset by forces more powerful than they and who are perceived as victims'.⁷ These more powerful forces would invariably be the contradictory social attitudes and morals put in place and perpetuated by dominant (patriarchal) ideology. Melodrama allowed these social contradictions to be explored on a personal and emotional level. Indeed the Fereshteh trilogy functions in precisely this way, seeking to critique a patriarchal and ideological system through an examination of how that system deeply affects the intimate spheres of home and family in Iran, particularly in the immediate post-Revolutionary period. During the 1980s, the study of melodrama shifted focus to consider the 'feminine' aspects of the 'weepies' or the 'woman's film'. Amongst feminist film critics, debates raged over whether the 'excessive' emotionality of the melodrama generated an 'over-identification' with the victim on the part of the female spectator, or whether it is appropriate to theorize the apparent tension or contradiction between thought and emotion in more complex terms.⁸ Williams notes that this debate was largely framed by a 1980s feminist understanding of pathos as 'a key agent of women's oppression', while anger was upheld as a 'liberating emotion'.⁹ The suggestion was that (female) spectators could not think and cry at the same time.

For film studies and feminist studies today such simplistic dichotomies of pathos/anger and oppression/liberation are unthinkable. Even in the 1980s Christine Gledhill, adopting a far more sophisticated approach, saw the problem as primarily one of epistemology: the necessity of understanding melodrama as a distinctive aesthetic form with its own representational logic. Melodrama, Gledhill argued, operates through its own set of aesthetic, structural and spectatorial conventions, and these need to be studied in their own right.¹⁰ Gledhill made a major contribution to the debate by showing how the possibilities of melodrama 'lie in [a] double acknowledgement of how things are in a given historical conjuncture, and of the primary desires and resistances contained

11 Christine Gledhill, 'The melodramatic field: an investigation' in Gledhill (ed.), *Home is Where the Heart Is*, p. 38.

12 Williams, 'Melodrama revised', p. 48.

13 Gledhill, 'Dialogue', p. 45.

within it'.¹¹ According to Williams, pathos does not necessarily cut off a spectator's capacity for thought but rather enables what she calls a kind of 'dual recognition', in which the spectator may simultaneously recognize 'how things are and how they should be'.¹² For Gledhill, melodrama 'deals with what cannot be said in the available codes of social discourse'. It does not merely represent the 'known and familiar' but simultaneously seeks to reveal what lies 'beneath' or 'behind'.¹³ Pathos emerges not from pure emotional identification but more from the fact that a film (via various nonverbal strategies such as mise-en-scene, music, gesture, camera, editing, and so on) makes the viewer aware of the underlying causes of the protagonist's predicament, knowledge to which the protagonist herself may have little or no access.

It is precisely this shift, from the known and familiar to the revelation of that which is hidden beneath the surface, that produces pathos in Milani's films. Additionally, due to the heavy censorship of films in Iran, melodrama serves as an important vehicle for expressing figuratively that which cannot be said within the allowable codes of state-controlled discourse. Through melodrama, Milani effectively reveals the underlying social, political and cultural causes of women's oppression, and in doing so attempts to bring the 'hidden halves' of women's lives – their experiences and emotions – into the open, into the public sphere, making them knowable and familiar. We see this in the climactic scene of *Two Women* described above. Fereshteh's slippage from the particular to the general reveals the fact that Hassan represents more than a single entity, but is emblematic more generally of patriarchal surveillance and control over women's lives. This is a theme that runs throughout the trilogy and contributes to the production of melodramatic pathos by articulating private life and public space. Significantly, in *Two Women* Milani takes Fereshteh's suffering out of the domestic sphere and allows her outpouring of emotion to spill out into public space – literally into the street – making it visible and knowable rather than allowing it to remain hidden behind closed doors. Melodrama thus becomes not simply a device for provoking pathos but a powerful strategy for revealing the complex interplay between public and private in contemporary Iranian society.

In the first two films of the trilogy, this 'making public' of women's experiences is achieved primarily through narrative structure and the omniscient gaze of patriarchal surveillance. Both *Two Women* and *The Hidden Half* unfold primarily in flashback. Milani launches these flashbacks from the vantage points of the late 1990s and early 2000s, constructing a privileged perspective of hindsight. In each case the *telling* of Fereshteh's story is a crucial element in her 'coming out' of a period of domestic seclusion. According to Williams, 'if a melodramatic character appeals to our sympathy, it is because pathos involves us in assessing suffering in terms of our privileged knowledge of its nature and causes'.¹⁴ This privileged knowledge is generally achieved through cinematic processes such as unrestricted narration,

14 Williams, 'Melodrama revised', p. 49.

whereby the spectator is granted access to more information than the suffering protagonist. In *Two Women* and *The Hidden Half*, privileged knowledge of the sociopolitical situation and the place of women in Iran during the immediate post-Revolutionary period is desirable for this dual recognition to be fully achieved. While viewing pleasure, and of course pathos, may still be activated without such knowledge, certain layers of the films' interplay between private lives and public space may fail to resonate with some viewers.

It is precisely this problem that Norma Moruzzi faced upon her initial viewing of *Two Women*. Moruzzi recalls being frustrated by Fereshteh's transformation from 'perfect superwoman to perfect victim'¹⁵ at the hands of her husband. In comparing *Two Women* with another Iranian film that deals with similar characters and themes, *Ghermez/Red* (Fereydoun Jirani, 1998), Moruzzi invokes the old melodrama/realism opposition: at first she dismisses *Two Women* for its use of 'the heightened characters and stagings of melodrama' but praises *Red* for its 'completely realistic, smoothly professional' style.¹⁶ Upon reflection, however, Moruzzi realizes why she failed to recognize the film's references to political and social events in the film and their role in Fereshteh's predicament: 'I was still applying an interpretive model in which private life can be assumed to function independently of public events'.¹⁷ In other words, she was blinkered not by any lack of knowledge but by the lingering negative attitude to melodrama apparent in her melodrama/realism dichotomy. However, in discussions with educated professional Iranian women who had experienced the Revolution, Moruzzi uncovered responses that brought into view this process of dual recognition afforded by greater knowledge: 'They recognised their younger selves in the heroine, and they also recognised the portrayal of a national political experience in personal terms'.¹⁸ Furthermore, their vantage point of the presidency (1997-2005) of reformist Mohammad Khatami helps to achieve this heightened sense of recognition. As Moruzzi notes: 'it's precisely because they've changed, as has the society, that the film can function as such a powerful cathartic experience'.¹⁹

In fact, just as these women appear to have responded both passionately and intellectually to the film through their shared experience and hindsight, Fereshteh occupies a similar position in regard to her own story in both *Two Women* and *The Hidden Half*. She may, in fact, be considered as representing a rather novel form of dual recognition, one that is embedded within the film itself. Here Fereshteh, viewing her life in retrospect, at once deeply identifies with her own suffering and is able to analyze the social, political and personal forces that have shaped her experiences. Along with the use of familiar melodramatic tropes, the embedding of such a figure in the text effectively helps to facilitate the process of recognition for those viewers who do not have the 'benefit' of direct experience. Indeed, Gledhill asserts this point for melodrama more generally:

15 Norma Claire Moruzzi, 'Women in Iran: notes on film and from the field', *Feminist Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2001), p. 92.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

19 *Ibid.*

20 Gledhill, 'Dialogue', p. 48.

female audiences in particular may deploy awareness of social and psychic contradictions in play which are not available to the characters themselves. It is important to stress, however, that such recognition does not depend entirely on personal experience or recent feminist analysis but is part of the rhetorical structure of the melodrama in which narrative and mise-en-scene offer the audience the privileged insight necessary to the functioning of pathos.²⁰

In the case of *Two Women* and the *Hidden Half*, narration and narrative structure are crucial to developing dual recognition. One key element of narration in *Two Women* derives from the fact that Fereshteh's story unfolds first as remembered by her former university friend, Roya, and then by Fereshteh herself. Initially Roya recollects their early friendship through rose-tinted glasses. This is presented as a 'success montage', illustrating Fereshteh's superior academic abilities and the happy times they spent studying together, and is mitigated only vaguely by references to the massive social upheaval caused by the Cultural Revolution in the background of several scenes. However, once Fereshteh is forced to leave Tehran and marry a man she does not love (Ahmad), her own narration takes over and we begin to see more clearly the complex series of events that has led to her domestic seclusion and subjection. Only once the two women are able to compare their perspectives does the complete picture emerge, and they realize not only how Ahmad had functioned as a gatekeeper, limiting Fereshteh's access to the outside world, but how he had deliberately created a misunderstanding between them: telling Roya that Fereshteh no longer wished to see her and forbidding Fereshteh from contacting Roya. In this sense Ahmad serves as a powerful figure of patriarchal surveillance, controlling and manipulating the flow of information – not unlike the organizations that censor Iran's media. Only in retrospect are both women able to realize how he had manipulated them. It can also be argued that Roya's passive acceptance of Ahmad's story indicates that the two women are separated by class difference, with Roya's middle-class upbringing and associated freedoms (such as the ability to study, have a career and choose her own husband) blinding her to the impact that social change and traditional values could have upon an ambitious young working-class woman like Fereshteh. Her situation more than hints at the restrictions placed upon women in the public sphere after the founding of the Islamic Republic, particularly women from 'traditional' families for whom the honour code was paramount, and the burden of maintaining the purity of both family and nation.²¹ Additionally, Fereshteh's seclusion in the domestic sphere after a period of active participation in society closely mirrors the fate of many women after the Revolution, when state rhetoric maintained that it was a woman's duty to resume her 'rightful' place as wife and mother. According to Guity Nashat, Islamic leaders' main aim for women was to restore them 'to what they consider women's primary role in society: domestic responsibility'.²² Many women like Fereshteh had no choice, particularly if they were from

21 According to Nikki Keddie, 'This code said that the honor of men resided primarily in the sexual purity of women, especially sisters and daughters. Not only adultery and fornication but lesser violations of the code could lead to (often unpunished) murder by patrilineal relatives.' Nikki R. Keddie, 'Iranian women's status and struggles since 1979', *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 60, no. 2 (2007), p. 24.

22 Cited in Moghadam, *Modernizing Women*, p. 171.

a poorer socioeconomic background. In Milani's films, representation of this domestic space as a place not of safety and security but of imprisonment by a powerful and controlling patriarchy effectively produces a particularly melodramatic interpretation of this chapter in the nation's history.

Furthermore, the honour code figures in the films as a key melodramatic device for generating pathos around its contradictory construction of woman as guilty victim. This may be seen as a culturally specific twist on the familiar melodramatic convention in which the central conflict may witness the fall from virtue of its female protagonist. In response, the restoration of her virtue becomes the driving force of the narrative. While we see Fereshteh as a victim of Hassan's and Ahmad's obsessive jealousy, she is seen by family, society and the law as the culprit. For example, Fereshteh is blamed for bringing shame upon the family through her stalker's actions, which include throwing acid at her male cousin and killing a child while chasing Fereshteh through the streets of Isfahan. Interestingly, during the court case that ensues, Hassan has a long monologue explaining his actions and emotions, while Fereshteh is denied the opportunity to speak. The dichotomy between male voice and female silence is a common melodramatic trope, and it serves here to underscore the heavy symbolic burden placed on women by the honour code, which regulates 'public' knowledge of the private sphere. Although Hassan is sentenced to prison for the child's death, he is never punished for stalking Fereshteh. Furthermore, it is assumed that Fereshteh must have acted immodestly to attract his attention in the first place; she is therefore treated by her father as the guilty party rather than the victim of a dangerous and obsessive stalker.

While Fereshteh is never ultimately vindicated within the diegetic world of the film, her honour and virtue are maintained for the spectator. This is achieved by establishing early in the film that Fereshteh is a consciously modest character, and this modesty is inscribed into the filmic text through the interplay of the active male gaze, the indirect gaze and the downcast gaze of feminine modesty. According to Hamid Naficy, the adoption of the modest gaze by both characters and camera is a key characteristic of the Islamicization of filmic discourse that took place following the Revolution.²³ Significantly, a range of different gazes is at play in *Two Women*, most noticeably in the scene in which Hassan's threatening presence is first made explicit. Fereshteh and Roya are waiting at a bus stop. The introduction of the threatening male gaze is preceded by a far more modest, distinctly non-threatening interplay of male and female gazes involving Fereshteh, Roya and a fellow student who had earlier proposed marriage to Fereshteh. While the two women are chatting in a two-shot, Roya turns her gaze towards screen left. The next shot shows a blue car slowly approaching from the direction of her gaze. Roya recognizes it as belonging to Fereshteh's suitor. Embarrassed but clearly flattered, Fereshteh reacts modestly by casting her gaze downwards as the car slowly cruises past. She reinforces her modesty by telling Roya not to

23 Hamid Naficy, 'Veiled vision/ powerful presences: women in post-revolutionary Iranian cinema', in Rose Issa and Sheila Whitaker (eds), *Life and Art: the New Iranian Cinema* (London: National Film Theatre, 1999), pp. 44-65.

Fig. 1. Fereshteh and Roya framed in the car mirror, in *Do zan/Two Women* (Tahmineh Milani, 1999).



24 The concept of *hejab* involves not only the veiling of women, but also embodies the principle of gender segregation and modesty for both men and women.

look. At this point we see a shot of the two girls framed in the car's side mirror along with an old man holding prayer beads, who is positioned slightly in the foreground (figure 1). This brief scene shows Fereshteh to be highly conscious of, and adherent to, the Islamic conventions of modesty (*hejab*).²⁴ The requirements of both male and female modesty in Islamic society are highlighted through the use of the indirect gaze, mediated by the mirror which literally frames the girls in the context of religious, and inherently patriarchal, values. As the scene unfolds, this playfulness is transformed. This time Fereshteh's gaze is distracted; a worried look suddenly appears on her face, underscored by a short burst of melodramatic music marked by a series of low, threatening notes. The next shot reveals Hassan, wearing a bomber jacket and army trousers. Fereshteh explains that he has been following her from her dorm every day. While the music and the abrupt change in Fereshteh's demeanour clearly signal her fear to the viewer, Roya initially does not seem to pick up on this emotion. Turning her gaze upon Hassan, she smiles and jokingly remarks how 'good looking' he is. This is important, as it shows that Roya is not emotionally 'tuned in' to Fereshteh's feelings, while the viewer is interpellated, primarily via the nondiegetic musical cue, into Fereshteh's point of view. A few shot/reverse-shots of Fereshteh and Hassan follow, in which Fereshteh has modestly lowered her gaze while Hassan looks actively at her. This constructs him as a threatening force, his gaze a powerful weapon, much like the knife he will brandish in later scenes.

Throughout *Two Women*, similar combinations of shot/reverse-shot structures and dark melodramatic music further emphasize Hassan's threatening gaze and encroaching omnipotence. Moreover, it is suggested that his gaze grants him 'ownership' over Fereshteh. This is reinforced through his speech and his actions, which reveal his conservative Islamic values regarding marriage and the place of women. Later, in the court

25 See Anthony H. Cordesman, 'Iran's Revolutionary Guards, the Al Quds Force, and other intelligence and paramilitary forces' (rough working draft), 16 August 2007, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, <www.csis.org/media/isis/pubs/070816_cordesman_report.pdf> [accessed 24 September 2008], p. 10.

scene, we learn that he considers it to be his right and responsibility to 'protect' her simply because he wishes to be her husband.

Although Hassan is literally represented as having a personal desire to 'watch over' Fereshteh, he is simultaneously established as a figurative embodiment of broader forces of social control of women in Iran. This is evident in his costume (bomber jacket and army trousers), actions and apparent omnipotence, all of which are highly suggestive of the *basij*, a voluntary militia force established by Ayatollah Khomeini after the Revolution.²⁵ Among the responsibilities of the *basij* is the duty to report transgressions of Islamic law. This includes policing the female dress code and rules relating to the association of unrelated men and women. With active full-time *basij* numbering some ninety thousand, like Hassan they effectively serve as the 'eyes' of conservative Islam in every corner of the country: 'I'll find you wherever you go' is Hassan's ominous threat. Throughout, Milani places a melodramatic emphasis on Hassan's omnipotent gaze and highly conservative Islamic values, suggesting that Fereshteh's personal experience is emblematic of the far more widespread practice of surveillance, control and 'protection' of women, whose 'purity' serves as a signifier of the Islamic nation itself. In true melodramatic fashion, Fereshteh becomes 'caught up' in Hassan's/Iran's conservative values as well as those of her family and her husband Ahmad, whose honour she must maintain. The fact that Fereshteh believes she has conducted herself with the utmost modesty generates enormous pathos, as we, and she, recognize that she is in control of neither public nor private perceptions of her own behaviour. Fereshteh's retelling of her story enables Roya, and by implication the viewer, to inhabit this space of dual recognition by raising our awareness of the effect of public events and changing social values on her personal and emotional life.

In *The Hidden Half* this embedding of dual recognition is even more explicit and strategic. This film tells the story of another Fereshteh, similar to but distinct from the heroine of *Two Women*. Both films show Fereshteh 'coming out' of a period of domestic seclusion. Whereas in *Two Women* Fereshteh had been literally imprisoned in the home by the conservative values of her husband, in *The Hidden Half* home and marriage serve as a place of refuge and safety. But even in this instance, with a kind and loving husband who encourages Fereshteh to continue her education, the home effectively serves as a site of repressed identity. As the film opens, Fereshteh learns that her husband Khosrow, a judge in the presidential department, is to travel to Shiraz to hear the case of a young woman who faces the death penalty for engaging in political activism. Recognizing that this young woman's story closely parallels her own of twenty years earlier, Fereshteh packs her memoirs in Khosrow's luggage. These tell of her heartbreaking life of love and activism in the immediate post-Revolutionary period, a life she has long kept hidden. Khosrow's reading of this text motivates the flashbacks that constitute the majority of the screen time. The precise structure of these flashbacks is a crucial factor in

embedding the process of dual recognition in the film. As Khosrow begins to read, we hear Fereshteh's voiceover narrate the first few sentences of her story before the image gives way to a flashback. This conventional technique inscribes Fereshteh as a character-narrator. Intermittently throughout the film, however, we return to the present, to Khosrow in his hotel room, and are thus reminded that he is *reading* her words and that he 'imagines' the images that bring her words to life. This structure effectively casts Fereshteh and her husband as conarrators, and this may explain why at times the scenes between Fereshteh and her lover Javid are charged with heightened emotional intensity, signalling not only the nostalgic tone of Fereshteh's memoirs but also Khosrow's jealousy – his personal attachment clearly leads him to imagine her story melodramatically. But this double narrative perspective also has a force beyond the personal and the emotive; it may also be read as Fereshteh reaching out into the public world.

Khosrow's position in the plot both as a judge in the presidential department and as Fereshteh's husband serves as an important point of articulation between the private sphere and the public world. Fereshteh chooses this moment to reveal her hidden past to her husband because she hopes her story may help the prisoner. Khosrow thus learns many things about Fereshteh's personal and political life that he never knew, as she attempts to impress upon him the value of listening to the whole story before passing judgement. Indeed, failing to hear both sides of the story is signalled as Fereshteh's biggest personal mistake, and ultimately one of the film's greatest sources of pathos. Towards the end of the film Fereshteh and Javid, the married man she had been in love with, meet by chance at a funeral; they have not seen each other for twenty years. Spying Javid across the room, Fereshteh attempts to slip away to avoid the inevitably uncomfortable conversation, but he follows her into the street. As in *Two Women*, it is in this public space that the most open conversation of the whole film unfolds. Javid chastises Fereshteh for simply disappearing all those years earlier and, as the familiar sentimental music swells melodramatically, explains that if she had stopped to listen to his side of the story she might not have been so quick to judge and things might have turned out differently. It is at this point, which may in Steve Neale's terms be described as an 'if only' moment,²⁶ that the spectator's privileged knowledge comes into play of how Fereshteh had been the victim of a misunderstanding wilfully orchestrated by Javid's estranged wife. This is one of those quintessential moments of deep regret that cuts right to the heart of any emotionally engaged melodramatic spectator as the protagonist herself comes to recognize how forces beyond her control have prevented events from playing out differently. What is interesting, however, is that this moment of utter pathos becomes Fereshteh's motivation for revealing her story to Khosrow. In other words, a deep sense of emotional loss and regret triggers what is in effect a political act, an attempt to intervene in the legal process of a woman she has never met but to whom she nevertheless feels deeply connected. Through this

26 Steve Neale, 'Melodrama and tears', *Screen*, vol. 27, no. 6 (1986), p. 12.

process of storytelling, Fereshteh embodies a form of embedded dual recognition. She is 'explaining' and analyzing her past for the benefit not only of her husband but also for us, the viewers, and indeed for the prisoner.

It is here, too, that we see the most crucial crossover from the personal to the political taking place. Fereshteh attempts to provoke her husband's own capacity for such recognition. Her recollections at once function on a nostalgic melodramatic level and provide a critical analysis of the impact of public events upon her – and as it turns out upon his – personal life. Additionally, it is important that this intervention is launched from the domestic sphere, allowing it to function as an example of activism 'from below'. It is through Khosrow, who represents both the domestic realm of the family and the broader institution of 'the law', that the film expresses a hope that the law may one day be capable of paying more attention to the needs of women. Unlike many of the other male characters in the film, including Rastegar (now Khosrow's colleague but previously a figure of patriarchal control, watching over and recording Fereshteh's youthful political activities with a leftist group), Khosrow is depicted as a kind and benevolent husband and father. He has the capacity to read her story sympathetically and thus, on a more abstract level, may emblemize a more progressive version of Iranian patriarchy. It is therefore appropriate to read the film against the political context in which it was made.

The Hidden Half was made right in the middle of reformist President Khatami's two terms in office (1997–2005), and the film's optimistic tone reflects the hopes that many Iranians, particularly women, had placed in Khatami and his government.²⁷ As a filmmaker, Milani had already seen Khatami's loosening of film censorship guidelines during his time as Minister for Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG, 1982–92); and although she maintains that she is not a political filmmaker, *The Hidden Half* arguably reflects the widespread hopes for change embodied by Khatami. Khosrow's character, therefore, aids in 'imag(in)ing' a more sympathetic judicial system, one that is capable of listening to the whole story. However, it seems that the film's imagining of change was somewhat premature. In a shocking twist of fate, several days after the commercial release of *The Hidden Half* in Tehran, Milani was arrested on allegations of promoting anti-Islamic and anti-Revolutionary messages, even though the film had been approved at all stages of the censorship process. The filmmaker found herself in a position closely mirroring that of the unnamed political prisoner in the film. After she had spent several days in custody, President Khatami intervened to secure her release. Milani's very real arrest and 'rescue' highlight the presence of contradictory forces within Iran's complex legal and political system, with a body of clerical leaders known as the Guardian Council appointed by Iran's supreme religious leader, the Ayatollah, and charged with powers of veto over any bills put before parliament. Thus, according to Nikki Keddie, while Khatami was 'able to relax cultural restrictions and censorship ... he did not have the power, or perhaps the will, to carry out

27 Many commentators have noted that the votes of women and young people were crucial to Khatami's election in 1997 and reelection in 2001. For example see Keddie, 'Iranian women's status and struggles since 1979', p. 28.

more extensive reforms'. The Guardian Council effectively blocked any 'laws favourable to women', ensuring that there 'were not major changes in law regarding women under Khatami'.²⁸ Milani's arrest may therefore be read in terms of this tension between a reformist President and more conservative parliamentary and judicial bodies. It is perhaps appropriate, therefore, that even though the film shows Khosrow's *willingness* to listen to the *whole* story, the prisoner's fate remains in the end undecided. The film closes on a freeze frame of the female prisoner shrouded in her chador, her face obscured by darkness (emblematic of 'everywoman'), as we hear Niki Karimi's voiceover repeating the words that began her story: 'I don't have any enjoyable memories of my childhood, everything was sorrow and regret'. Milani allows us to imagine a positive outcome, but hesitates actually to present one. Through the indeterminacy of the ending, spectators are encouraged to recognize the possibility that things could go either way. So, while the Khatami era enabled filmmakers like Milani to highlight issues central to women, legal reform to women's rights did not ensue.

What is framed as important in both *The Hidden Half* and *Two Women* is the practical importance of communication – as much between women as between women and men – about issues that affect women's everyday lives. The Fereshtehs effectively model a practice of talking about their experiences that spectators might mirror in their lives outside the cinema. Additionally, by casting both Fereshteh and Khosrow as conarrators in *The Hidden Half*, Milani suggests that change will only occur when women *and* men recognize the inequalities inscribed in Iran's legal and political system.

These films effectively produce what Stephanie Donald has described as a 'symbolic public space', by opening up a figurative space analogous to, but removed from, the world 'out there', where issues specific to women may be aired indirectly through a complex system of signs.²⁹ This is necessary because of Iran's heavy censorship of media and publishing, which prevents free and open discussion of social and political issues in the public sphere. The cinema, therefore, has the potential to contribute to what Alexander Kluge calls a 'counter public sphere' (*Gegenöffentlichkeit*), 'a type of public sphere which is changing and expanding, increasing the possibilities for a public articulation of experience'.³⁰ It does not replace the existing public sphere but sits within it, exerting pressure on it from 'below'. In fact, according to Gledhill, 'Melodrama is not about revolutionary change but about struggles within the status quo'.³¹ As the Fereshteh trilogy progresses, the films evoke a gradually increasing sense of such struggles, and in response we see a corresponding shift in both style and genre between *The Hidden Half* and *The Fifth Reaction*.

Structurally *The Fifth Reaction* departs significantly from the first two films. Rather than being told in flashback, Fereshteh's story unfolds entirely in the present (around 2003), and the second half of the film is

29 Stephanie Donald, 'Landscape and agency: *Yellow Earth* and the demon lover', *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 14, no. 1 (1997), p. 98.

30 Alexander Kluge 'On film and the public sphere', *New German Critique*, nos 24-25 (1981-82), p. 211.

31 Gledhill, 'Dialogue', p. 45.

structured around a chase, lending it a fast-paced forward momentum. This imbues the film with elements of the action genre, which serve to modify the film's generic surface structure but do not ultimately alter its deep indebtedness to melodrama, as the 'action' sequences are bracketed, and to some extent shut down, by the film's far more powerful melodramatic impulse. If the first two films focus on the female protagonists' frustrated struggle to attain a higher degree of social participation against the overwhelming strictures of patriarchal dominance, *The Fifth Reaction* is less about self-actualization but deals more specifically with the issue of child custody, as a widowed Fereshteh must fight her father-in-law for the right to keep her children. As in the earlier films, the theme of making women's stories 'public' is privileged both through the act of talking and by allowing the personal to spill out, often literally, into public space, effectively animating Fereshteh's struggle as yet another version of the melodrama of the nation. Furthermore, while the previous two films attempt to promote recognition of women's oppression through dialogue, here Milani appears to advocate a more active response. As we shall see, however, despite the fact that Fereshteh manages to keep moving throughout the film, even reaching the very edges (both literal and metaphorical) of the nation space, we can only ever be presented with an ambiguous ending. While this is somewhat reminiscent of the end to *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991), I would argue that it is far less open to an optimistic reading; Fereshteh seems ultimately frustrated in her attempt to transcend the confines of her existence. But the film's power may in fact lie less in the ending than in its efforts to imagine a 'symbolic public space' in which women do not merely talk but engage in some small acts of resistance.

The Fifth Reaction's opening scene is crucial for setting up the melodramatic, and very public, revelation of the 'private' matters of women, which in turn sparks the transition from talk to action. As in the other two films, the setting of this key scene in a coffee shop, a public rather than a domestic space, ensures that women's issues and desires are figured as a social matter rather than being relegated to the private realm. The scene opens in a cafe in which a group of five female colleagues have gathered to console Fereshteh, whose husband has recently died. The camera observes each of the five women as they talk and laugh about love. Taraneh speaks enthusiastically of how her husband is a kind and loving man, fondly imitating the way he says 'I love you' in his Turkish accent. As the camera moves around the table to record the women's laughter, only the slightly older and unmarried Maryam seems to register any sign of disbelief: 'You talk about your husbands as if they are not from this country'. This is emphasized by a subtle change in Maryam's demeanour: as she shifts her gaze away from Taraneh, who is sitting across the table, towards the offscreen space, her smile neutralizes before becoming slightly wary. She then utters the words 'Taraneh, isn't that your husband?' Taraneh quickly turns her head, allowing us to witness a corresponding shift in her demeanour. This is underscored on a cinematic

level with a sudden move from deep to shallow focus and a slight forward zoom towards Taraneh in the foreground before a rapid cut to a shot of Taraneh's husband (Hossein) moving towards the café's outdoor terrace. He is accompanied by his secretary. It is at this point that the first major melodramatic conflict of the film is staged. This has the effect of producing a level of recognition – for the female protagonists and spectators alike – that their romantic visions of their husbands constitute merely a protective outer surface, a public face worn to obscure the darker side of their domestic lives.

As the scene continues, Hossein, having by now noticed Taraneh and her friends, approaches their table. The camera tracks back, mirroring the powerful forward movement of this heavy-set man. Although Taraneh attempts to maintain her public mask with a smiling face, her nervous hand gestures reveal her inner agitation as she stands to face her husband in a two-shot. Hossein demands to know what she is doing here. Taraneh, clearly embarrassed, attempts to 'save face' by maintaining a happy demeanour and the illusion that he allows her to do as she pleases. 'Who gave you permission?', inquires Hossein threateningly, demanding that she go home immediately. Realizing that her public mask has now slipped, Taraneh allows her frustrations to appear from deep within the layers of her private self. She becomes both agitated and defiant, refusing to submit to his command. Hossein throws accusations at the café manager and then at Taraneh's friends: 'You call yourselves women, mothers. Is it right that at noon, when your husbands and children are hungry at home, you are sitting here joking around?' As Taraneh becomes calmer and more steadfast in her defiance, the camera pulls closer, framing the couple in a series of much tighter, alternating, over-the-shoulder shots which have the effect of heightening the emotional intensity of the scene. As Hossein delivers his ultimatum 'Come with me now or never', Taraneh retorts 'I'm not coming, do whatever you want'. It is at this point that Taraneh's body language most poignantly reveals the 'true' nature of her relationship with her husband. She preemptively ducks to her left, raising her right hand to protect her face. It is not until the next shot that Hossein begins to lunge violently forward as though to strike her. A closeup of Taraneh follows, her hand cradling her face as though she has actually been hit, and is perhaps the most melodramatically affecting shot of the entire sequence. After focusing on Taraneh alone for several seconds, the camera pulls out as she turns to face her friends, who now look back in recognition of her 'hidden half'. What they, and we, see is a woman whose body bears hidden scars, the submerged memories of a life of brutalization at the hands of her husband – a familiar melodramatic trope.³²

While this scene arguably functions according to the universal melodramatic conventions of repression and expression of emotion, there is also an element of cultural specificity that is key to producing a very special kind of dual recognition. In Iranian culture, the 'self' is generally considered to be complex and multilayered. This has a profound effect on

³² It should also be noted that the lack of actual physical contact between Taraneh and her husband is also predicated by Iranian censorship regulations, which proscribe such contact.

33 Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: the Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (New York, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), p. 5.

34 See Mary Catherine Bateson 'This figure of tinsel: a study of themes of hypocrisy and pessimism in Iranian culture', *Daedalus*, vol. 108, no. 3 (1979), pp. 125-34. Of course, as Bateson points out, there are times when these practices are used disingenuously.

interpersonal communication. At any one time a complex dynamic of *zahir* (visible or apparent) and *batin* (hidden or concealed) is at play. In social discourse, a variety of forms of indirect communication, or what may be described as social 'veiling', are used in order to protect the inherently 'virtuous' private, inner realm of the self and family from the potentially corrupting influence of external, social forces. This not only underpins the literal practice of veiling (*hejab*), but involves other ritualistic modes of discourse including the honour code, religious dissimulation (*Taqiyeh*) and the elaborate practice of performing social courtesy (*Ta'arof*). According to Farzaneh Milani, social 'veiling' 'disguises some thoughts and emotions and plunges both parties, the addressee and the addresser, into a kind of factual suspense'.³³ In Iranian culture generally this practice of generating 'factual suspense' is not considered a sign of hypocrisy but is rather built on a mutual dynamic of risk, trust and respect, and serves to protect the honour, integrity and virtue of both parties.³⁴ This is clearly at play in the opening scene of *The Fifth Reaction*, as the women spin magnificent stories of their loving, doting husbands, which as the scene unfolds are revealed to be false. While this behaviour may be read simply as an attempt to deceive (themselves and each other) and to construct a fantasy world to escape the reality of their situations, in the Iranian context such an interpretation would be far too simplistic. On one level the stories serve a dissimulating function in order to protect personal and family honour. Within the available codes of social discourse these women are colleagues and friends, but their interpersonal relationships do not function at the level of familial intimacy and it would not be appropriate to discuss matters of marital disharmony or maltreatment. As a result, the women actively produce these stories to protect themselves and their families from public embarrassment. On another level these stories serve to protect the listener, as an inappropriate revelation of suffering may cause the listener to suffer by being made to feel pity. Furthermore, the ubiquity of these social codes in Iranian society tends to produce an assumption that no social discourse can be taken at face value. Each of the women at the table will, to some extent, understand that these codes are in play. There is an indication of this when Maryam politely signals her disbelief, remarking that their husbands do not seem Iranian at all. By veiling her disbelief she 'protects' her friends, allowing their elaborate masks to remain intact. This is shattered by the film's orchestration of Taraneh's melodramatic undoing.

According to Gledhill, melodrama seeks to reveal the 'beneath' and 'behind' of a situation, and in doing so allows the spectator to recognize both 'how things are and how they should be', as Williams puts it. This scene presents a double image of 'how things are' by showing how the codes of social discourse not only prevent women from speaking openly about their condition but actively cause them to construct elaborate masks. Interestingly, while the masks are an effect of prevailing cultural codes and social conditions, they nevertheless provide an image, albeit a highly idealized one, of how things should or could be. Taraneh's undoing leads

to one further act of recognition: the acknowledgement that these masks are in fact counterproductive to women taking collective action and therefore tend to reinforce their oppression. Melodrama, unlike realism, thus serves a practical function, in that its epistemological system allows for the kind of sudden reversal that takes place next.

The very public exposure of Taraneh's private life and her decision to stand up for herself becomes a catalyst not only for her to take action and teach her husband a lesson, but for the other women – Nasrin, Farideh and Maryam – also to drop their public masks and air their own private struggles and sorrows. Once they have done this, the women begin to analyze the conditions that gave rise to their respective situations. For example, Nasrin speaks of the social pressure of being married to a war hero: 'What? Divorce a war hero?', she exclaims. Divorce is similarly impossible for Farideh, as everything she owns is in her husband's name. Rather didactically, the women identify the patriarchal nature of 'faith, law and tradition' as the greatest impediments to women's self-determination. Nasrin remarks: 'Our problem is that we are so dependent on our men that we allow them to do anything they want to us'. Milani shows the process of self-analysis by which the women reach a state of dual recognition as they reflect on the sorrow of the way things are under a highly patriarchal culture and attempt to imagine how things could be otherwise. Courageously, Taraneh decides that she will be the first to act by standing up to her husband, thus beginning the drive that will eventually see Fereshteh challenging her father-in-law over the custody of her children. While Fereshteh is decidedly silent during this scene and throughout the first half of the film, it is her eventual response that may be understood as the 'fifth reaction' of the film's title, and it is through the collective efforts of her friends that this quiet and timid character will begin to act. As Nasrin aptly puts it: 'This situation won't change with talk; you have to act seriously'.

As mentioned above, *The Fifth Reaction* to some extent enacts a departure from the strictly melodramatic mode of the first two films in the trilogy, opening up during the second half of the film to a structure that more closely resembles an action film combined with elements of the road film and female buddy movie. This shift in the dramatic structure of the film is necessary, for Milani seems to have exhausted the trope of revealing the 'beneath' and 'below' of her female protagonists' situations through the reciprocal practices of talking and listening. Here she wishes to model a much more active approach, although, as I shall demonstrate, the film's thematic and formal texture remain deeply underpinned by melodrama.

Following the long opening sequence, the film divides into two distinct narrative strands, brought together intermittently through similar gatherings of the five friends. The first of these follows the story of Taraneh's act of 'resistance' against her husband. Significantly, this is barely visualized in the film, but reported to the group by Taraneh herself. Instead, Milani affords her spectators exclusive access to Fereshteh's

developing domestic situation. The group eagerly follows reports of Taraneh's success, which is largely afforded her by her privileged economic status and results in her merely gaining more economic freedom (a car and her marriage portion) with no guarantee that her husband will change his brutal ways. In contrast, they barely have any knowledge of what is going on in Fereshteh's life. Depicted as a very private and modest character, in contrast to the other members of the group she does not construct an elaborate public mask behind which to hide her situation, rather she simply remains silent. Thus Milani places the spectator in a privileged spectatorial position in regard to Fereshteh; we alone are granted direct and intimate access to the struggles she faces in her private life. Enormous pathos is therefore generated for Fereshteh when, during these gatherings, the camera focuses on her melancholy face. Her friends appear to read this as a sign of mourning, but we know it to be a sign of a much deeper inner torment.

Fereshteh's situation is revealed to us in a few key melodramatic scenes that occur in increasingly domestic situations. Milani transitions us gradually into Fereshteh's private world, beginning with the relatively public space of a mourning ceremony at the graveside of her husband, at which her father-in-law is silently introduced as a powerful figure. This is established cinematically through the framing of Hadj Safdar in a high-angle establishing shot amongst the mourners. The camera cranes dramatically in and down towards him, accompanied by dark melodramatic music. His power and control is further emphasized through the dominant use of controlling eyeline looks towards Fereshteh and other members of his family. We are then brought further inward, into the space of Hadj Safdar's car as he explains to Fereshteh that it is not 'religiously correct' for her to remain in his home once the traditional forty-day mourning period is over. Furthermore, he expresses his desire to raise his son's children himself, leaving Fereshteh's role in this scenario less than clear. As Fereshteh pleads desperately with Hadj Safdar, the now familiar melodramatic music begins to swell, before Hadj Safdar puts a hold on the proceedings and we cut to the car moving away into the traffic. This is followed by a few shots of Fereshteh looking reflectively at children playing in the schoolyard where she teaches (figure 2). Poignantly, her face and then her point of view are marked by the vertical bars of the window through which she looks, a simple but quintessentially melodramatic sign of her hopeless situation and a moment that foreshadows the final scene of the film.

Milani then draws us even further into the home, the very site of emotional and ideological contestation between Fereshteh and her father-in-law. The scene takes place in a large living room. The characters are shot against the background of floor-to-ceiling windows, conspicuously covered by curtains, which protect this domestic space from the prying and corrupting eyes of the outside world but allow some light to penetrate. A silhouette effect is created by framing the characters against the vast wall of semi-translucent curtaining, partially obscuring

Fig. 2. A melodramatic sign of Fereshteh's hopeless situation, in *Vakoneh-e panjom/The Fifth Reaction* (Tahmineh Milani, 2003).



Fig. 3. The domestic space is veiled from the world outside, in *Vakoneh-e panjom/The Fifth Reaction* (Tahmineh Milani, 2003).



them from view (figure 3). This also has the effect of emphasizing Hadj Safdar's powerful presence in contrast to Fereshteh's diminutive frame. Throughout the scene, Hadj Safdar insists that Fereshteh leave his home now that the mourning period is finished and he will assume sole custody of her children. Fereshteh's pleading has little effect on him. The scene is shot in a style highly reminiscent of a daytime soap opera. Milani positions Hadj Safdar with his back to Fereshteh throughout most of the scene. In many of these shots, Milani reinforces his control by positioning him in the foreground, facing the camera. Fereshteh in contrast is relegated

to the background, powerless within the ideological construct of the family from which she is being excluded. Crucially, however, by the end of the scene Hadj Safdar provides Fereshteh with one last chance to remain a legitimate member of the family. 'You may keep the children', he says pointing his index finger, 'on one condition. That you marry Majid' (one of his two remaining sons). As he utters these words, he turns to face Fereshteh for the first time during the sequence; she, however, is relegated to the very edge of the frame, clearly a marginal figure in this proposal. As Fereshteh utterly refuses this intolerable condition, Hadj Safdar once again turns his back on her, reinforcing her exclusion from the family. Throughout this sequence, Milani has refrained from underscoring the images with the now familiar melodramatic music; instead, she uses it at the very end of the scene to punctuate the devastating consequences, as Hadj Safdar leaves the room and the camera tracks in to capture the defeated look on Fereshteh's face, which we alone share with her.

Throughout the first half of the film, therefore, Fereshteh is presented as a typical melodramatic protagonist, a powerless woman who suffers at the hands of a powerful male authority figure and the ideological system that supports him. Milani's strategy of granting the viewer exclusive access to Fereshteh's inner torment through a series of highly melodramatic scenes, while withholding this from her friends, creates a greater level of pathos: we are unable to intervene to alleviate Fereshteh from her suffering. Around the middle of the film, however, Fereshteh is brought to breaking point; a point which not only sees her take action but correspondingly sees the film itself take flight from all the melodramatic pathos summoned so far. This comes with the revelation that Hadj Safdar intends to send the children to live with his daughter in Isfahan, from where they may eventually be taken to Singapore. Until now, Fereshteh has accepted her fate and settled into the routine of seeing her children once a week. But the threat of this permanent separation from her children is so unbearable that she finally decides to act. She intends to take the children and escape to Dubai. Following a scene in which Fereshteh unsuccessfully asks her brother for assistance, the film suddenly cuts to a lively scene in which her friends are excitedly discussing her escape plan. In contrast to the first half of the film, it now really begins to shift gear stylistically and structurally in order to mirror the fervour of collective action taking place at the narrative level.

The second half of the film is structured as a chase, alternating between Fereshteh's flight with Taraneh in her new car and the efforts of Hadj Safdar to track her down using the resources of his national transport company. In order to add a sense of pace and action to this chase, which bears a close structural resemblance to the female road/buddy movie *Thelma and Louise*, Milani uses a variety of wide long-shots showing the women's car travelling through the landscape. She accompanies this with a much livelier version of the film's theme music – a kind of Persian-inflected western music. After the tensely charged melodrama of the first half of the film, this has a highly cathartic effect, allowing the viewer to

feel Fereshteh's sense of liberation, filled with hope that she will achieve her goal. This is expressed in a scene in which the women stop to change a flat tyre, and Fereshteh is shown immersed in a sea of sunflowers. In Persian these flowers are known as *gol-e aftabgardoon* – literally, flowers that turn towards the sun – symbolizing loyalty and hope. In slow motion we see Fereshteh spinning amongst the sunflowers, head held high towards the sky. The fantastic, dreamlike quality of the scene, however, frames it as an imaginary escape, a brief ray of hope that Fereshteh will survive these dark times. Moments later, she reveals her identity to a couple of truckers. Not knowing they are members of Hadj Safdar's posse, she invokes his name to shield herself from their threatening advances, ironically falling back on the kind of patriarchal 'protection' from which she is trying to escape.

Despite the sense of liberation generated by the shift in the stylistic schema of the film, the viewer is provided with far greater knowledge of the situation through the use of crosscutting. As Hadj Safdar gets closer to tracking Fereshteh down, so the frequency of crosscutting increases. This has the effect of generating suspense, but additionally prepares us for the return to melodramatic pathos by the end of the film. As the film heads towards its final melodramatic denouement, crosscutting is used to enhance the spectator's access to knowledge and to underscore the thematic trope of omnipotent patriarchal surveillance that runs throughout the trilogy. Hadj Safdar takes on a role similar to that played by Hassan in *Two Women*. In contrast to Hassan, however, Hadj Safdar's place at the head of Fereshteh's family allows his omnipotence and conservatism to become all the more insidious. Throughout the first part of the film his omnipotence functions predominantly on this domestic level. During the second half of the film Milani facilitates his allegorical slippage from the particular to the general, so that he stands more emphatically for the systematic sociopolitical forces that curtail the reform of women's rights in Iran.

As the owner of a large national freight company, Hadj Safdar is shown to have not only economic power but also extensive powers of surveillance. His national network of transport routes allows him to have eyes in every part of the country. Through these resources he is able to coordinate efforts centrally to track Fereshteh's every move, without actually engaging in the chase himself. In this sense he serves as a metaphor for the disembodied powers of state surveillance, which are multiply embodied by the police, *basij* and Revolutionary Guard, who extend these powers onto the streets. Beyond this metaphorical level, Hadj Safdar uses his economic power to divert the resources of the state to his own cause. Through his police connections he is able to organize the surveillance of airports, ports and borders as well as the tapping of Fereshteh's friends' phones. It is also important to note that he is known by the honorific signifier 'Hadj', which commonly refers to a person who has been on pilgrimage to Mecca and is therefore a devout and observant Muslim. Milani, however, sows doubt in the viewer's mind on this point,

when Zeer Madineh, a particularly strong matriarchal boat-owner who assists Fereshteh, accuses him of misusing using the title Hadj when he has 'never been on pilgrimage'. This reinforces the sense expressed throughout the film that his need to control Fereshteh may stem largely from the realm of 'tradition' and the desire to preserve the family's public image (honour), even if this means a sacrifice of her rights as a mother. This is another example of Milani's strategy of revealing the 'beneath' and 'below' of a situation, making visible the sometimes contradictory layers of identity that circulate in the course of everyday communication in Iran. It also enables her to show how Fereshteh's fate is determined by a complex and multilayered combination of 'faith, law and tradition' as identified earlier by Farideh.

Despite the visually liberating effect achieved by giving Fereshteh a high degree of 'mobility' through the movement of the car in the landscape, the frequent use of wide shots, her fantasy scene amongst the sunflowers and the moments of laughter and friendship shared with Taraneh during this part of the film, her act of 'taking flight' is rendered inherently ambivalent: it is at once liberating and a desperate attempt to escape. This sense of ambivalence increases as the narrative moves closer to the final showdown. The crosscutting becomes more frequent, intensifying the weight and inevitability of patriarchal control catching up with her. Correspondingly, our hopes for her escape also diminish. This is an important point in the trilogy as a whole, whereby Milani presents us with an image of female mobility, creating an idea of how things *should* be while simultaneously reminding us of the way things *are*. We recognize and identify with the importance of Fereshteh's struggle and at the same time we recognize its futility under the current sociopolitical/familial conditions. We can at once imagine the fantasy of a last-minute escape, yet thanks to our greater knowledge of Hadj Safdar's superior powers we are well aware that Fereshteh's chances are slim. This inevitability is also expressed in generic terms: just as Hadj Safdar closes down Fereshteh's hopes of escape, so too Milani closes down the film's foray into the action genre. Although the ending of the film is characteristically ambiguous, its reversion to melodramatic tropes seems to proffer a rather pessimistic reading.

The final scene of the film takes place in a dark prison cell and cinematically returns to the tighter framing of the characters in mid-shots. Milani uses expressionistic low-key lighting to create dramatic shadows across Fereshteh's small *chador*-shrouded figure. Bars of light and shadow emphasize her physical and ideological imprisonment. Recalling the earlier scene in the family living room, as Hadj Safdar approaches he is preceded by his own immense shadow, which towers over Fereshteh as she crouches diminutively against the rear wall of the cell. Once again he raises his finger authoritatively and once again he utters the words: 'I'll let you keep your children ...'. In the pause between words, the viewer may, for the last time, feel a hopeful suspense. Perhaps Fereshteh's efforts have been worthwhile after all; but no, Milani does not provide a reductive

Fig. 4. Fereshteh overshadowed by her father-in-law, in *Vakoneh-e panjom/The Fifth Reaction* (Tahmineh Milani, 2003).



solution to such a persistent problem, for these words are ominously followed by the familiar phrase ‘on one condition’. This statement is emphasized by a freeze-frame that serves to further ‘capture’ Fereshteh in an uncertain fate. As the credits roll, accompanied by the melancholy soundtrack, we are left to contemplate her tiny, now static, figure, dominated by Hadj Safdar’s pointing finger, his actual self dematerialized into an abstract and diffuse symbol of patriarchal power (figure 4).

Milani’s judgement of Hadj Safdar’s actions is certainly ambivalent. Her refusal of an overtly triumphant or happy ending may be read in generic terms as the delay, rather than the destruction, of wish fulfilment. This film, as with the other films in the trilogy, carries with it a wish, a desire for women to successfully break from the bonds of patriarchal power. To some extent, therefore, the ending permits, in Neale’s words, ‘a retention of the fantasy whether or not it is fulfilled by *these* characters in *this* film. It is always too late, yet it might be possible.’³⁵ I would, however, add a coda to this generic reading of the ending, as I believe it is also necessary, as with the rest of the trilogy, to read the film in terms of the political climate surrounding its context of production.

If the ending of *Two Women* is suggestive of the hopes for reform presented by Khatami’s election in 1997, and the ending of *The Hidden Half* expresses the cautious ambivalence about the beginning of Khatami’s second term in 2001, then the ending of *The Fifth Reaction* must surely be read as a sign of growing dissatisfaction that the promised reforms, particularly in women’s rights, had not materialized by 2003 when the film was released. At this stage in Iran’s history, the ‘condition’ to be imposed upon Fereshteh by Hadj Safdar and, by implication, the

35 Neale, ‘Melodrama and tears’, p. 22.

36 Moruzzi, 'Women in Iran: notes on film and from the field', p. 92.

greater patriarchal nation he represents, is likely to be just as limiting and restricting as the first.

Milani's decision to use the 'heightened characters and stagings of melodrama'³⁶ over a more tempered style of 'realism' across the trilogy is, I believe, appropriate to the nature of her subject matter. She is, as I have argued, attempting to reveal the complex dialectical interplay between the seemingly exclusive realms of the inner and the outer, the private and the public, to show how Iranian women since the Revolution have been constructed as dutiful wives and mothers. Milani effectively interprets the post-Revolutionary period as a kind of melodrama of the nation in which women's desires and ambitions were suppressed, and at times closed down, by the inherently patriarchal nature of Revolutionary discourse.

Throughout the trilogy Milani uses the epistemological structures of melodrama strategically, not simply to illuminate instances of women's oppression in the realm of home and family but to suggest the ways in which broader social forces impact upon women's lives more generally. Through her strategy of embedding the process, dual recognition within the films themselves, she thereby models such practices for her viewers. These practices, as I have shown, primarily involve talking and listening, and are meant to enable the recognition and analysis of one's own situation. In *The Fifth Reaction* Milani pushes this a little further, through her temporary slippage from melodrama to action, to suggest that the time for talk is over and that action must begin, even if these acts of resistance, as exemplified by Taraheh and Fereshteh, are more or less futile. The emotional involvement and pathos encouraged by the melodramatic form does not here function as an 'agent of women's oppression'³⁷ but rather serves to make visible the 'desires and resistances'³⁸ available to women in the kinds of oppressive situations represented in the films. Furthermore, Milani's use of melodrama is strategic and practical for mounting her critique of the many indirect 'veiled' modes of communication used in everyday interactions in Iranian culture. The outpouring of emotion available to the melodramatic protagonist at crucial moments enables public masks to be removed.

Milani once said in an interview that she never intended her films to present solutions to the complex problems facing women in her society, but that she hoped her viewers would be moved enough by them to generate debate and discussion about the possibility of change.³⁹ To echo Neale, her melodramas provide for the 'possibility that things [could] be different, that the fantasy *could* [be] fulfilled, the object of desire indeed attained'.⁴⁰

37 Williams, 'Melodrama revised', p. 46.

38 Gledhill, 'The melodramatic field', p. 38.

39 I paraphrase from comments Milani made in discussion with Julie Rigg at a Sydney screening of *The Hidden Half* organized by the author, 9 August 2006.

40 Neale, 'Melodrama and tears', p. 22. I have, for strategic reasons altered Neale's past tense into the future conditional.

I would like to thank Lisa Trahair for her comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

Urban unknown: Chantal Akerman in New York City

KENNETH WHITE

Aside from a few passing references, Chantal Akerman's activation of perspective as a formal determinant of the image track of *News from Home* (1976) does not feature greatly in the film's critical reception. Neither is New York City's organizing grid given adequate consideration in the critical analyses, though it forms the content of Akerman's spare, master-shot images. The specific attributes of New York are diminished in favour of the mother–daughter dynamics expressed on the film's soundtrack. The city is acknowledged in terms of relational distance from Akerman's native Belgium, from where her mother writes the letters which form the eponymous 'news from home' read in voiceover by Akerman. For Adriana Cerne, 'The foreign city of New York' underscores the remoteness of Akerman's location of filming in relation to the source of her mother's reports,¹ while Tijana Mamula describes Akerman's images as 'abandoned' to 'fluctuating abstraction'.² Cerne also suggests that New York is to Akerman as Dresden was to Freud's 'Dora': an incidental site of anxiety through which psychological aberrances, generative of feminist discourse, play out independently of the possible particular influences of that location.³ Maria Walsh states that *News from Home* 'images a space without content', and is an instigator of 'unbound sensations of pure affect';⁴ while for Ivone Margulies a 'more radical process than a play of absence and presence ... is at stake here'.⁵ In the context of Akerman's appropriation of her mother's letters, Margulies claims, the filmmaker privileges inheritance and indebtedness associated with intergenerational relationships. These relationships, as with the other points of analysis described, leave open opportunity for further

1 Adriana Cerne, 'Writing in tongues: Chantal Akerman's *News From Home*', *Journal of European Studies*, vol. 32, nos 125–126 (2002), p. 236.

2 Tijana Mamula, 'Matricide, indexicality and abstraction in Chantal Akerman's *News From Home* and *Là-bas*', *Studies in French Cinema*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2008), p. 272.

3 Cerne, 'Writing in tongues', p. 241–42.

4 Maria Walsh, 'Intervals of inner flight: Chantal Akerman's *News From Home*', *Screen*, vol. 45, no. 3 (2004), p. 192.

5 Ivone Margulies, *Nothing Happens: Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 152.

investigation of the filmmaker's visual representation of her particular urban site.

This essay explores Akerman's visual engagement with New York and the dependence of this engagement upon the material organization of the city itself. As I shall argue, Akerman's cinema is composed *with* New York's streets and buildings. The film does not represent 'a space without content', 'unbound sensations of pure affect', as Walsh claims; rather, it is rigorously bound by Akerman's sensitive, partial experience of New York. *News from Home* is contingent upon the city and Akerman's navigation of it. Moreover, her images are compelling informants of the 'radical process of presence and absence' described by Margulies, who reads Akerman's position in terms of familial relations but does not describe the particular properties of perspectival delineation in Akerman's recording of New York that may inform such relations. If we consider the film in the context of the perspective theory set out by art historian Erwin Panofsky, Akerman's image track is as radically revelatory as the inheritance and indebtedness Margulies finds in Akerman's voiceover. Our understanding of Akerman's soundtrack will be enriched through further attention to her visual strategies. Joanne Morra writes that 'Akerman seems to be reading [on the soundtrack] in an attempt to grasp the ungraspable'.⁶ I believe that Akerman's engagement with the perspectival order of New York vividly elucidates this ambition. Panofsky's description of perspective as an 'objectification of the subjective' provides an appreciation of *News from Home* as a film intimately tied to New York and its grid.⁷ Akerman's cinematic composition and editing in conjunction with the New York grid, and the conceptual order of perspective that city seems so easily to embody, are of primary concern. I aim here to describe how Akerman uses the representational capabilities of cinema in resonance with the New York grid to express her personal experience of ambivalent, temporary residence in that particular urban environment.

Akerman's camera, operated with cinematographer Babette Mangolte, consistently asserts the Manhattan grid. The 16mm, eighty-five-minute film is comprised primarily of fixed-frame master shots from positions in street-level exteriors, Subway trains and platforms, or from within automobiles. Linear perspectival orientation defines every shot. In infrequent lateral pans, the filmmaker turns her camera to rest on a 'found' frame ordered by explicit perspectival space. The architectural logic of this specific urban environment conditions each composition. In addition, Akerman positions her camera between forty-eight and fifty-six inches from the ground – her personal height of view. Her rigorous adherence to perspectival space communicates her relationship with the city.

In *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, Panofsky describes the historical and theoretical uses of the systematic plotting of perceived space, and explores perspective's symbolic power as a unifying determinant of any field. The art historian begins with Albrecht Dürer's emphasis on the meaning of the Latin word *perspectiva*: 'seeing through'.⁸ Perspective is a historical

6 Joanne Morra, 'Daughter's tongue: the intimate distance of translation', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2007), p. 104.

7 Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. Christopher S. Wood (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1997) p. 66; originally published as 'Die Perspektive als symbolische Form', *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg 1924-25* (1927).

8 Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, p. 27. Quoted from K. von Lange and F. Fuhse, *Dürers schriftlicher Nachlass* (Halle, 1893), p. 319, 1.11.

9 Ibid., pp. 30-34.

10 Ibid., p. 57.

11 Ibid., p. 61.

12 Ibid., p.138, fn. 61.

13 Ibid., p. 67.

14 Ibid., p. 31.

technology for ordering perception into a privileged point of view. Perspective is a 'systematic abstraction ... comprehensible only for a quite specific, indeed specifically modern, sense of space, or if you will, sense of the world'.⁹ Correlative distances between depicted figures may be understood through mathematically rationalized lines that recede to the central vanishing point. The grid 'becomes an index for spatial values' that stretch to an imagined infinity.¹⁰ Numerical measurements express bodies, intervals and movement within the depicted space. Further, that depicted space is subservient to a perceptual order that is exterior to itself. 'Precisely the finiteness of the picture makes perceptible the infiniteness and continuity of the space.'¹¹

Panofsky describes how, following the trecento experimentation of artists such as Ambrogio Lorenzetti in his painting *Annunciation* (1344) and Dirk Bouts in his *Last Supper* (1464-67), Leon Battista Alberti applied the 'visual pyramid' to perpendiculars converging to a central vanishing point. In Alberti's formulation, a picture is a planar cross-section of this pyramid. Its apex is the perceiving eye. The pyramid's equidistant sides yield the orthogonals that produce the supposedly correct depth intervals on the receding perpendiculars of the composition. The result is quattrocento perspective: a grid that demarcates depth of field into regimented, proportional sections. Any pictured scene is incidental to the commands of abstract, preordained division. However, Panofsky notes that Alberti's method entirely breaks down when applied to objects that cannot be derived from a square. The human form is such an exception.¹² Panofsky begins the fourth and final section of *Perspective as Symbolic Form* by observing that while perspective may assert exacting rules of composition, the system

makes that phenomenon contingent upon human beings, indeed upon the individual: for these rules refer to the psychological and physical conditions of the visual impression, and the way they take effect is determined by the freely chosen position of a subjective 'point of view'.¹³

Panofsky concludes that perspective informs a profoundly insecure, not a privileged, viewing position. I would argue that the art historian's revelation is a compelling premiss from which to explore Akerman's position within New York's grid.

News from Home engages perspective at the point where, to follow Panofsky, it 'takes effect' in Akerman's lived experience of New York. The 'fundamental discrepancy between [the] "reality"' of New York 'and its construction' in the medium of cinema is central to her work.¹⁴ In Akerman's images, it is this troublesome juncture of systematic activation of the perspectival order of the New York grid and her personal interaction with that system that constitutes the film. I would argue that Akerman engages perspective as an (anti-revelatory) apparatus in *News from Home*. The ordering system both constitutes her city of temporary residence and obstructs the total comprehension supposedly promised by that system.

15 The discrepancies of New York's grid must be acknowledged here. My claim is that the dominant organizational form of the island vividly exemplifies the order connoted by the perspectival system.

16 See Margulies, *Nothing Happens*, p. 68. Quoted from Chantal Akerman, 'Chantal Akerman on *Jeanne Dielman*: excerpts from an interview with *Camera Obscura*, November 1976', *Camera Obscura*, vol. 1 no. 2 (1977), p. 119.

17 Margulies, *Nothing Happens*, p. 44.

18 See, particularly, *ibid.*, pp. 36–41.

19 Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, p. 30.

Perspective, so severe and absolute in New York's grid, delivers no clear, privileged view.¹⁵ *News from Home* is not a definitive dyad of home–foreign, mother–daughter or city–inhabitant. Akerman belongs in neither her 'home' (Belgium) nor her present, temporary residence of New York. She visually expresses this lack of belonging through adherence to the found system. And it is her apparently strict adherence to that system that reveals its inherent instability. The grid is complicating and contingent in its supposedly immobile divisions. The city is an apparatus, like Akerman's camera fixed in frame and focus.

Speaking of her camera position in *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Belgium, 1975), her classic film produced just before *News from Home*, Akerman remarks, 'But the camera was not voyeuristic in the commercial way because you always knew where I was'. However, Margulies quotes Akerman as saying 'You always know where I am'.¹⁶ I believe Akerman's statement should be treated with healthy suspicion. Margulies cites Akerman's comment as paradigmatic of the filmmaker's hyperrealist, anti-anthropomorphic aesthetic, evidenced in her projects in fiction and documentary modes alike. Margulies writes that the 'predictability of her methods of framing and cutting forces one to attend instead to her mise-en-scene'.¹⁷ On the contrary, Akerman's depiction of illusory space through the found perspectival order of Manhattan necessitates sustained consideration of the filmmaker's particular methods of cinematic structure within this specific urban environment. It is precisely Akerman's framing and cutting that demand further attention. While a full discussion of Akerman's response to conventional modes of identification in commercial cinema is outside the scope of this essay, the past-tense form of Akerman's statement reminds us of the importance of the filmmaker's presence at the site of recording, her experiential tie to her depicted environments. If we consider her statement within the context of *News from Home* as well as *Jeanne Dielman*, her use of the past tense is especially intriguing as the former film was composed from two distinct visits to New York City, three years apart. Margulies carefully considers the film practice of New York resident Andy Warhol in relation to Akerman, particularly their shared proclivity for fixed frame and focus.¹⁸ But just as Warhol's notoriously 'unwatchable' film of the Empire State Building certainly calls for sustained scrutiny, it is worth applying further analytical pressure to Akerman's declaration. We certainly recognize her position in identifiable New York streets, pavements and Subway trains. Passers-by often acknowledge our/Akerman's/the camera's position (figures 1 and 2). For example in the opening shot of the film, which is discussed below, our/Akerman's/the camera's presence disrupts the passage of a car (figure 3). The filmmaker's mode of production, inspired and constituted by this particular built space, describes the distress and apparent contradictions of remote participation. Panofsky observes that perspectival space 'is a purely functional and not substantial reality'.¹⁹ Perspective is a theoretical system that acquires aesthetic form, but the space it demarcates does not



Fig. 1. Passers-by acknowledge the camera. All images in this essay are from *News from Home* (Chantal Akerman, 1976).



Fig. 2. Passers-by acknowledge the camera.



Fig. 3. The camera's presence disrupts the passage of a car, in the film's first shot.



Fig. 4. The man fourth from left gestures at the filmmaker and camera.



Fig. 5. Vestry Street sign is visible top-centre. The seated woman is the one seen in profile in fig. 4.



Fig. 6. New York Subway passengers stare at the camera and filmmaker.

correlate to experienced place. As I shall argue, the filmmaker chooses her frames in collaboration with the city. We may always know Akerman is behind the camera, framing our view through the rigour of New York perspectival space, but privileged views do not come with our distanciation from the depicted streets. Akerman produces master-shot compositions for the purpose of underscoring the inability of perspective, as provided by New York, to encapsulate its subjective content, especially the filmmaker's own. We might be able to identify where Akerman was in New York, but it is precisely the disjunction between the apparent stability of the city's grid organization and the filmmaker's ambivalent experience of it that constitutes her cinema.

We hear Akerman's voice on the soundtrack of *News from Home*, reading letters sent from her mother in Belgium during seven months in 1972 and 1973 in which the filmmaker visited New York. In 1976 Akerman returned to New York, and it was during this second visit that she produced the image track. The entire soundtrack of the film is postdubbed. Roaring Subway trains, traffic noise and pedestrians' voices rise and fall in carefully composed competition with Akerman's monotone delivery of her mother's text. Her mother writes in French but, as Akerman notes, her syntax expresses her Yiddish and Polish heritage.²⁰ Marriages, divorces, medical ailments, new romances, financial difficulties and the weather guide the mother's words. She writes of unseen people, places and events. We have no context for her information, only Akerman's recitation in English.²¹ The letters are already consigned to history, having been written and received during Akerman's first trip to New York. Between the time of receipt and that of translation and reading, Akerman had returned home and departed again. Thus disjunction defines the form and content of *News from Home*: we do not see the New York to which Akerman's mother writes, but the city of a few years later. 'My dearest little girl ... come back to me soon ... we don't mind you having left without telling us' – the mother's letters provide a narrative not immediately found in the image track. As previously noted, it is this supposedly more informative mode of address that is the concern of almost all the critical attention given to the film. Akerman's voice on the soundtrack of *News from Home* has defined the film's reception. But, as Panofsky states, 'Perspective, finally, opens art to the realm of the psychological'.²² The psychological implications of perspective assist our understanding of Akerman's experience of New York and particularly her expression of distanciation in her image track as well as her soundtrack.

Notably, Jennifer M. Barker engages New York as a determinant of Akerman's film. Following Michel de Certeau, she writes: 'Through forms of architecture and urban planning, and through forms of *being in* architecture and urban spaces, subjects of the city write and are themselves written in spatial and corporeal terms'.²³ Akerman is 'the intersection of the maternal ... and the material, in the form of the city she and the other New Yorkers around her occupy'. *News from Home* is a

20 See Gary Indiana, 'Getting ready for *The Golden Eighties: a conversation with Chantal Akerman*', *Artforum*, vol. 21, no. 10 (1983), p. 55-61.

21 Akerman conducted her voiceover in French for the original release of *News from Home* and reperformed it in English for the film's distribution in the USA. In a further example of distanciation more tangentially associated with *News from Home*, the film did not receive its New York premiere until 11 July 1989. See Stephen Holden, 'Beauty amid the beastliness in portraits of Manhattan', *New York Times*, 11 July 1989, p. C16.

22 Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, p. 72.

23 Jennifer M. Barker, 'The feminine side of New York: travelogue, autobiography and architecture in *News from Home*', in Gwendolyn Audrey Foster (ed.), *Identity and Memory: the Films of Chantal Akerman* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University, 2003), p. 46.

24 Ibid., p. 55.

25 That is, until the conclusion of the film, in which the newly completed World Trade Center Twin Towers are in view for much of the final shot's eleven-minute duration.

26 Barker, 'The feminine side of New York', p. 49.

27 Ibid.

28 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), p. 91.

29 Ibid.

30 Margulies, *Nothing Happens*, p. 43.

means for Akerman to explore her relationship with her mother as well as with New York, 'which becomes much more than an abstract theoretical project'.²⁴ But Akerman is not a New Yorker. *News from Home* is the product of an individual on uneasy terms with her environment. Certainly Akerman's depiction of New York displays 'much more than an abstract theoretical project'. But Barker does not address the defining characteristics of New York (nor the absence of those characteristics) – such as the particular streets and Subway trains that Akerman travels, the absence of quintessential architectural landmarks,²⁵ the dominance of perspectival space, and her editing strategies – that may inform the mother–daughter relationship of the soundtrack. In fact, Akerman's camera does 'merely observ[e] from a distance'.²⁶ In that distance – created not by a permanent resident, nor with a 'touristic' approach' – Akerman defines herself through and against the quadrants of New York.²⁷ It is this tension between the perspective particular to Manhattan and Akerman's negotiation of its spaces that determines *News from Home*.

It is worth giving further attention to de Certeau in this context. In 'Part III: Spatial Practices' of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau describes New York as 'a wave of verticals'. From the 110th floor of the World Trade Center, his view of the city is of a 'gigantic mass immobilized before the eyes'.²⁸ Akerman exploits this specificity of vision offered by New York and its grid but from street level. She negotiates the particular abstraction of the city to display the fleeting activity it contains – and which is imperceptible from de Certeau's elevated perch. The fixed frame and focus of her camera align the horizontal and vertical edges of the film frame to the 'wave of verticals' of her environment. Filmic structure and urban structure are reciprocal in *News from Home*. Akerman transforms the abstraction of New York, its 'paroxysmal places',²⁹ into the material platform from which to assert its contingent occupants. Perspective, to return to Panofsky's claims, has subjective experience at the core of its objectification of vision. Akerman activates the supposed immobilization wrought by perspective so that she may display the many people who walk and drive through New York's grid. *News from Home* is a record of the filmmaker's ambivalent position among her fellow pedestrians (figures 4–6).

Upon her arrival in 1972 Akerman immersed herself in New York's independent film culture. At Anthology Film Archives and the Millennium Film Workshop she viewed the work of the burgeoning avant garde. So-called 'structural' films were prevalent, and the Canadian interdisciplinary artist Michael Snow remains especially important to Akerman. His films *Wavelength* (1967), \leftrightarrow [*Back and Forth*] (1969) and *La Région Centrale* (1971) were completed and screened at the time of Akerman's first visit to New York. *News from Home* was made 'under the influence of structural filmmaking', Margulies states.³⁰ While a full reckoning with Akerman's interaction with the varieties of theoretical definitions and modes of production deemed 'structural film' is outside

31 P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: the American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 348.

32 Ibid., p. 355.

33 This is where I diverge from Fredric Jameson's reading of *News from Home*. Hardly 'indifferent' to the passersby, I would argue that Akerman's camera gives us the privilege of mutual contemplation within structures (of cinematic style and urban design) that would not appear readily capable of sharing those subjectivities. See Fredric Jameson, *Thresholds of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 171.

34 Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York* (New York, NY: Monacelli Press, 1994), p. 20.

35 Ibid.

36 Akerman, quoted in Janet Bergstrom, 'Chantal Akerman: splitting', in Janet Bergstrom (ed.), *Endless Night: Cinema and Psychoanalysis, Parallel Histories* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 274. Quoted from Jean-Luc Godard, 'Entretien sur un projet: Chantal Akerman', trans. Janet Bergstrom, *Ça Cinema*, no. 19 (1980), p. 15.

the scope of this present investigation, it is useful to consider P. Adams Sitney's writing on the American avant garde, which was so influential on Akerman at the time of her visits to New York. Sitney defines structural film by four characteristics: 'fixed camera position ... the flicker effect, loop printing, and rephotography off the screen', noting that all four traits rarely exist in the same work.³¹ Structural cinema is marked by predetermined systems of construction. Content is supposedly evacuated for the assertion of form, often emphasizing the mechanical functions of the cinematic apparatus itself. Sitney deems *Wavelength* an exemplary structural film for its forty-five-minute zoom across a loft apartment from the 16mm camera's widest field of vision to its most narrow view. This camera action is indifferent to the human drama that occasionally enters the profilmic space. Flash frames, coloured filters, rephotography and other effects interrupt the material continuity of the loft's representation. 'Consciousness of the self' as viewing subject defines structural film.³² I would argue that this self-consciousness is analogous to the subjective core at the centre of perspectival objectification found in *News from Home*. However, contradiction defines the character of the filmmaker's self-consciousness. Her passive recording of the city at once bares the rigour of structural film's introspection (we are aware of the filmmaker's choices of frame, position, duration: Akerman's role as a viewing subject in New York, and by extension our own viewership) while deflating the revelation of such a system. In a way, Akerman's self-consciousness comes into definition precisely because she chooses to set herself against a structure that she did not create. Akerman objectifies her self-consciousness through the dressings of structural film, all the better to reveal the shifting subjectivities that course through the channels of her appropriated system.³³

News from Home displays a uniquely contingent and specific form of technological determinism. For Akerman, New York *is* perspective, a material unit constructed of lines east to west and north to south. It is New York that provides Akerman's structure: the city is her predetermined system of production. As the architect Rem Koolhaas writes of New York, 'The plotting of its streets and blocks announces that the subjugation, if not obliteration, of nature is its true ambition'.³⁴ The city is a grid of 2028 blocks; at Fifth Avenue, Manhattan is divided east and west. Koolhaas continues, 'In its indifference to topography, to what exists, [the grid] claims the superiority of mental construction over reality'.³⁵ It is this supposed indifference to organic matter that the filmmaker uses as her defining premiss. Akerman says, 'I love to film cities. I love to film them because they have lines'.³⁶ The lines of New York are supremely accommodating to Akerman's predisposition. They do not readily announce narrative exposition, and perhaps this explains the preponderance of critical attention given to Akerman's voiceover. New York, as much as her relationship with her remote mother, is her subject for redefinition. Her 'structural' film is contingent upon New York. An analysis of several shot sequences in *News from Home* will

illuminate Akerman's personal expression by a means of visual distancing.

Consider the previously mentioned opening shot of *News from Home* (figure 3). We see an urban canyon, a space represented in severe perspectival linearity. Our viewing position is in the middle of a vacant street, which progresses directly forward from our fixed, master-shot view. Our sight is from street level. High brick and iron walls closely hug the pavement. We see from the second storey in the near distance to perhaps the seventh storey in the far distance. Street lamps accent the buildings' verticality and the kerbs, bricks and window sills provide explicit orthogonal progress to a central vanishing point below frame-centre. The buildings appear industrial in use: there are no shopfronts and no people. An Oldsmobile appears from frame-left, travelling to our viewing position on a cross-street in the middle distance. It turns right to continue towards us but pauses in mid turn. We imagine the driver seeing Akerman, Mangolte and their camera on its tripod in the middle of the street. The car continues; perhaps Akerman has gestured for the driver to come forward. The car slowly advances towards us, filling the frame, then creeps around the camera. It rolls over the kerb onto the pavement out of frame. The driver successfully avoids the obstruction (us) in his path. The material apparatus of our vision is duly noted and circumvented by Akerman's fellow occupant of the urban space. Akerman's camera remains fixed in position after the Oldsmobile lumbers around us. We see a Volkswagen Beetle emerge and disappear in the middle distance on the same street from which the first car turned. Five people, carrying boxes, walk from the far distance towards the camera. They turn left towards the point from where the two cars emerged. Akerman cuts after they all pass from view behind the building at frame-left.

The camera, the vehicle of our perception, is acknowledged and absorbed by other navigators of the urban system. Our viewing position is contingent: streets and their traffic continue out of view to the left and right in middle distance and behind us. Akerman gives us textbook quattrocento perspective, an ordering window on the world, but it is defined by environmental limit and chance. New York provides the orthogonals, Akerman exploits them, and the inherent insecurity of our position is asserted. Through the indexicality of photochemical registration, assisted by the filmmaker's sharp focus and even exposure, the depicted image is an adequate reproduction of our optical perception. However, this determining system betrays its limits in the very first image of the film. Imposed historical, structural distancing is supplanted by a singular, corporeal affront: the Oldsmobile weaves around its obstruction and continues on its path outside our ordered view, and thus the objective structure of Akerman's composition is diminished. As we imagine the Oldsmobile progressing down the street behind us into subsequent urban spaces that remain unknown to us (our view does not adjust), we are aware of the particular contingency of our perception. New York continues beyond us in multiple directions upon its regimented x, y and z axes. Our

view displays activity that registers itself as much as it does other, unseen spaces. Akerman utilizes the camera, perspective and New York grid apparatuses to imply the activity of millions of subjectivities that cannot be cordoned by a totalizing system. In *News from Home*, the filmmaker's particular view of New York reminds us of the many consciousnesses that share the city's structure. In a further example of reflexivity, the very first shot from within a New York City Subway train traveling south on the 1, 2, 3 Line between Christopher and Canal Streets presents Akerman, Mangolte and their 16mm camera recording their own image for three minutes and thirty-one seconds, punctuated by briefly glimpsed fellow passengers (figure 7). Akerman activates predictive strategies for the ends of usurping the supposed purpose of those strategies. Perspectival certainty is destabilized by the contingencies of its depiction.

Consider the series of shots in the middle of *News from Home* (figures 8–12). Each shot is between twenty-three seconds and one minute and thirty-four seconds in duration. They are recorded, as throughout the film, from the filmmaker's own height. Their frames are static and their content appears in crisp focus. Pavement demarcations provide clear, broad orthogonals in mid distance. In the first shot, at frame-right, parked cars in the far distance provide another natural orthogonal to a vanishing point at the frame's centre. Pedestrian traffic streams around the stationary camera. Warm mid-morning sunlight provides distinction to the men and women in their professional business dress. Many glance at the camera, some for longer than others. In another shot, a street corner is framed by the block on one side, a utility pole on the other. High midday light and overcast sky eliminate shadows. Akerman cuts again: another street corner, more curious pedestrians. The time appears to be early evening. A frame similar to that of the previous shots records fewer pedestrians passing by our viewing position. The pedestrians wear more casual clothing and move less hurriedly. Akerman then cuts to a nighttime shot. Traffic signals, a neon sign for the Kashmir Theatre, and the light from shop windows illuminate her master-shot frame. In the first shot of the sequence, the 'E 46' street sign can be seen on the utility pole, barely visible due to Akerman's fixed wide-frame composition (figure 8). No street sign is visible in the next shot (figure 9). We see a sign for West 46th Street in the third shot (figure 10). There is no street sign in the next frame (figure 11), then East 46th Street reappears in the fifth shot. In the sixth we see 'W 46' in the top-right of the frame. In the eleventh shot of the sequence we return to the position held in the third shot (figure 12).

Over the course of a day and a night, Akerman moves her camera around the four corners of the intersection of Fifth Avenue and 46th Street. She repeats her movement three times, resulting in twelve shots. We see three shots at each corner of the East–West divide of 46th Street. Akerman is around the corner from the Rockefeller Center in the north-west and Grand Central Station in the south-east. She is at the geographic centre of Manhattan. The centre of *News from Home* is spent at the four corners of the centre of the New York grid; the filmmaker places



Fig. 7. Akerman, Mangolte and their 16mm camera are just visible in the first shot within a New York Subway car.



Fig. 8. The first frame of the first shot in Akerman's circuit at the intersection of Fifth Avenue and 46th Street. We are positioned on East 46th Street corner, looking south on Fifth Avenue.



Fig. 9. The first frame of the second shot in Akerman's circuit. We are looking west down West 46th Street.



Fig. 10. The first frame of the third shot in Akerman's circuit, looking north on Fifth Avenue. The 'W 46' sign is just visible in the top right of the frame.



Fig. 11. The first frame in the fourth shot of Akerman's circuit, looking east down East 46th Street.



Fig. 12. The eleventh shot in Akerman's circuit, again looking north on Fifth Avenue.



Fig. 13. New York Subway station interior.



Fig. 14. The penultimate shot of *News from Home*.

Sitney's self-conscious viewer at the locus of the defining structure of New York. Akerman engages a structural methodology to assert her presence, among so many others moving in front of her camera, at the central quadrant of the grid. Panofsky remarks that perspective is a contingent system bound not by static relations of perceiver and perceived but by fluctuating corporeal variables within a limited concept of reality. For him, perspective is not projected upon a flat plane but a variable concave surface: the eye of the viewer.³⁷ It is this tension of representation bound to corporeal faculties that Akerman instrumentalizes. 'The represented space remains an aggregate space; it never becomes that which modernity demands and realizes, a systematic space'.³⁸ Distance defines perspectival unity in its historical development.³⁹ As many scholars have noted, the distance between Akerman and her mother is readily evidenced on the soundtrack of the film, but on the image track of *News from Home* we are just as readily reminded by Akerman's cinematic apparatus of the 'substantial and measurable' distances of New York.⁴⁰ That her images never fulfil the systematic space that they seem to espouse (recall that we 'always knew where she was', and by definition this is her particular view) affirms the contingency of experiencing her structuring determinants.

Akerman's manipulation is further evidenced in the editing strategies she employs in her shots recorded within New York City Subway stations (figure 13). In these shots, the soundtrack roars in correspondence with images of trains arriving to their station platforms. The cacophony builds to apparently natural crescendos. However, Akerman compresses the trains' movement in both picture and sound material. Slight variations in light quality from frame to frame and fleeting sound breaks reveal Akerman's alteration of what appears, in the context of previous and subsequent shots in the film, to be documentary in form. These supposedly continuous shots belie the filmmaker's revision of the trains' arrivals and departures. The trains travel at Akerman's preferred pace.

Consider the penultimate shot of *News from Home* (figure 14). From the interior of a Subway train moving laterally, Akerman cuts to a view of Tenth Avenue from the rear of an automobile. Our position remains at street level. New York flows away from our view into a vanishing point at frame-centre. We are in the middle lane of northbound traffic. We see the skyscrapers of Manhattan's Financial District recede in a smooth flow

37 Ibid., p. 31.

38 Ibid., p. 42.

39 Ibid., p. 47.

40 Ibid., p. 49.



Fig. 15. The film's final shot, approximately five minutes into the eleven-minute shot.



Fig. 16. Frame of the final shot at nine minutes.

thanks to the vehicle's hydraulic suspension. The shot is not unlike a 'ghost ride' of early cinema. The shot is one minute and forty-two seconds in length. Cars accelerate in adjacent lanes until they are out of frame. We slow and halt at unseen traffic lights, and cars seen earlier now return to our frame of view. We recognize that we are moving further into urban space but it is visible only once it has passed into the peripheral of frame-left and frame-right. The blocks of Tenth Avenue and neighbouring traffic lanes are reformed into kinetic orthogonals by perspective and the camera. 'My dearest little girl ...', we hear on the soundtrack. But the mother's words become increasingly inaudible against the postdubbed cacophony of New York. The letter remains inconclusive, abruptly disconnected. Fittingly, we know only in retrospect that this is the final letter that Akerman will read to us.

The noise peaks and Akerman cuts again. At first it seems we are in a nighttime shot, making another temporal leap by montage. Local artificial lights can be seen, but we have no sense of spatial positions in the darkness. The lights quickly begin to diminish, and we realize they are receding in space. Natural light floods into our view; we are under a platform. The camera is on a ferry, probably the Staten Island Ferry, pulling away from Manhattan. The traffic noise abates. In the previous shot, Tenth Avenue North recedes in our rear view; now we move south. Gulls circle and follow the ferry. Emotionally, this shot, over eleven minutes in length (the entirety of one, four-hundred-foot magazine of 16mm film), registers as our concluding departure (figures 15 and 16). Certainly Akerman does not take the Staten Island Ferry all the way back to Belgium; this final shot is a poetic elision of her actual travel. We move with her away from the particular urban perspective of New York to an increasingly unfathomable mass of Atlantic Ocean. The city shrinks away as we move into space utterly incommensurable with perspectival domination. Kerbs, utility poles, Subway trains and the grid are replaced by the shifting, undulating surface of water. Akerman and her photographic apparatus depart from the perspectival apparatus of New York. The width of our view of the New York skyline increases. Grey mist envelops the skyline.⁴¹

Throughout *News from Home* we remain modestly fixed to pedestrian vision. Unlike de Certeau and his ascent of the World Trade Center, Akerman does not go to the top of any New York buildings. To see the

41 With Akerman's readily admitted inspiration from Michael Snow in mind, it is amusing to consider Snow's *Wavelength* – a continuous zoom into a black-and-white photograph of waves – in conjunction with the concluding shot of *News from Home*: a sustained track backwards (by way of the ferry) through ocean waves.

42 Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, p. 20.

43 Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, p. 31.

44 Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, p. 21.

grid in its full, abstract form stretching across Manhattan would deviate from the filmmaker's personal experience of the city's coordinates. It is the material relation between herself and the perspectival function of the city that guides her image production. The 'subjugation, if not obliteration, of nature'⁴² may appear to be the apparatus's intent, but in *Perspective as Symbolic Form* Panofsky describes the nascent subjectivity of that apparatus. Akerman reasserts the particular subjectivities that navigate this subjugated space through her engagement with the imposed perspective of New York. She displays her contribution as a temporary, uneasy New York participant. Her shot sequence at the juncture of Fifth Avenue and 46th Street occurs at the centre of New York, but in *News from Home* it is Akerman's New York. This peculiar relationship is incomplete because of, not despite, the perspectival promise of the city's definitive spatial coordination. *News from Home* places a decentred, corporeal and contingent view at the locus of its mode of representation. Akerman privileges the limitations of our perception. The film is a rigorously partial meditation on the purported objectivity of perspectival order.

Akerman's emphasis on subjective contingency in the perspectival system opens the possibility for self-aware viewership within that objective system. By considering Panofsky's assertion of perspective's transformation of 'psychophysiological space into mathematical space' we achieve awareness of the grid's foundational subjectivity, its adaptive pedestrian content.⁴³ Koolhaas writes that, in New York City, 'one form of human occupancy can only be established at the expense of another. The city becomes a mosaic of episodes, each with its particular life span, that contest each other through the medium of the Grid.'⁴⁴ While New York's material structures may continually usurp and revise each other within the demarcation of its 2028 blocks, the people of these structures cohabit within an organic system of singular perspectives that informs the material structure of their location as much as it informs their lives. Our status as feeling creatures defines the city as much as its quadrants do. For her part, Akerman's witness of 'the mosaic of episodes' enacted by the human occupants of New York is the privileged viewing position in *News from Home*. She composes her personal cinema from 'the medium of the Grid' so as to reveal – or to 'see through', to return to Dürer's definition of *perspectiva* so important to Panofsky – the latent subjectivity of its aggregate space.

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The Colour dossier

Introduction: the mutability of colour space

SARAH STREET

In their introduction to *Color: the Film Reader*, Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Price reflect on the neglect of colour in film studies and note that their book, published in 2006, is intended to have a ‘galvanizing function, making clear the many issues and ideas to which one must attend in any consideration of color’.¹ Since then there have indeed been significant publications on colour which similarly draw attention to its importance in the history of cinema and as a broad, culturally-based theme, relevant to today’s technological transformations.² As David Batchelor observes, ‘an inquiry into colour can take you just about anywhere’; and the field continues to be open to new research, theoretical perspectives and approaches.³

Part of the reason for colour’s relative neglect in film and cultural studies may have been the methodological and conceptual problems with grasping its multifaceted nature. For much of its history, commentators played down colour’s contribution to film, emphasizing instead its function in underscoring dominant narrative trajectories, neither drawing attention to itself nor acting as a distraction. Colour, it was felt, should be kept in its place as secondary to more important concerns such as plot development.⁴ Although some scholars wrote about colour, no consensus emerged concerning its relation to film. Rudolf Arnheim, for example, considers colour’s potential artistic contribution to be limited, bound to the realist codes of mechanical reproduction.⁵ Sergei Eisenstein, on the other hand, argues that as

- 1 Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Price (eds), *Color: the Film Reader* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), p. 2.
- 2 Examples of recent books include Eirik Hanssen, *Early Discourses on Colour and Cinema: Origins, Functions, Meanings* (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2006); Wendy Everett (ed.), *Questions of Colour in Cinema: from Paintbrush to Pixel* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007); Scott Higgins, *Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow: Color Design in the 1930s* (Austin, TX: Texas University Press, 2007); David Batchelor (ed.), *Colour: Documents of Contemporary Art* (London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2008); Raphaëlle Costa de Beauregard (ed.), *Cinéma et couleur* (Paris: Michel Houdiard Éditeur, 2009); Richard Misek, *Chromatic Cinema: a History of Screen Colour* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). See also two issues on early colour, edited by Kim Tomadjoglou, of *Film History*, vol. 21, nos 1 and 2 (2009); and *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, no. 12 (2010), Special Issue on Colour in British Cinema and Television, ed. Simon Brown and Sarah Street.
- 3 David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), p. 124. The amount of research being undertaken on colour was demonstrated at the Colour and the Moving Image Conference held in Bristol, July 2009.
- 4 Adrian Cornwell-Clyne was a typical exponent of this view in *Colour Cinematography*, 3rd ed. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1951), p. 662.

- 5 Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), p. 131.
- 6 Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense* (1942), trans. Jay Leyda (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), pp. 120-21.
- 7 Everett, *Questions of Colour in Cinema*, p. 26.
- 8 Jacques Aumont, *Introduction à la couleur: des discours aux images* (Paris: Colin, 1994), pp. 180-87; Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1952), p. 242; Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: the Movement-Image* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 118.
- 9 Deleuze, *Cinema 1*.

- 10 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 90-91.

- 11 Paul Nash, 'The colour film', in Charles Davy (ed.), *Footnotes to the Film* (London: Lovat Dickson, 1938), p. 132.

inherently malleable and capable of creating shifting, contextual meanings within a film narrative, colour should be understood 'organically' in relation to the whole work.⁶ Wendy Everett notes how 'the presence of movement ... sets filmic colour apart'⁷ for other key theorists, including Jacques Aumont, Béla Balázs and Gilles Deleuze, who also argue that the relation between colour and object is not fixed.⁸ The latter in particular emphasizes how colour does not refer to a particular object but absorbs all that it can, drawing on Godard's succinct observation that 'it's not blood, it's red'.⁹

Fixing symbolic meaning to colour thus takes us only so far. How filmmakers use it makes it remarkable, capable of an infinite variety of ways to stimulate the imagination. Yet this can create problems for audiences versed in 'reading' films in a particular way. As Stanley Cavell observes, the cultural power of black and white to 'dramatise reality', as a continuum from the traditions of nineteenth-century drama, is challenged by colour, despite the knowledge that colour is capable of representing the world as we literally see it. His point is that the colour film world is a less knowable one than that presented with the more familiar conventions of the 'black and white axis of brilliance ... along which our comprehensibility of personality and event were secured'.¹⁰ The essays in this dossier present four case studies of how, in different ways, new contexts for colour analysis challenge established approaches, readings and conventions. The themes reflect different phases of developing research on animation, restoration, colour in non-western cinemas and the impact of digital technologies.

Animation has always raised interesting questions for colour. As the artist Paul Nash noted: 'The problem of producing colours from pictures where the colours are arbitrarily designed is a very different affair from actual colour photography which attempts to reproduce the natural colour of objects in Nature'.¹¹ Len Lye's painting directly onto negative film for *A Colour Box* (GPO Film Unit, 1935) and *Rainbow Dance* (GPO Film Unit, 1936), and Norman McLaren's *Love on the Wing* (GPO Film Unit, 1939), are classic examples of how animation pushed the boundaries of experimental colour design in the 1930s. Once freed from the imperative to replicate 'natural' colour, the form could deploy colour freely and in a context in which audiences would not judge colour simply according to arbitrary standards of 'realism'. As Kristian Moen demonstrates here, even though Disney's *Silly Symphonies* were intended for the mass market – and thus their use of colour would be expected to relate to narrative development – the films provide many examples of 'transformation' whereby colour is as mutable, expressive and fluid as music. As their titles suggest, the *Silly Symphonies* were experiments using colour and music as mutually dependent registers. The examples cited by Moen indeed present colour changes within a frame and across frames, which critics such as Élie Faure appreciated for their complexity. Rather than using colour as a static register, movement is deployed to express nature's constantly changing forms, textures and moods. The daily transformations

that take place in the natural world, often at a micro level, are expressed by colours that shift and mutate. In this way, Disney's films challenged the dominant trends of critical discourse which, despite an ostensible concern to harness colour to 'realism', did not favour its demonstration of a symbiotic or spectacular relationship with the external world.

Problems with 'reading colour' are also raised here by Alex Clayton's case study of different versions of *Jour de fête* (Jacques Tati, 1949, 1964, 1995). Notions of Tati's 'parametric' form, in which stylistic patterns are displayed as arbitrary and unmotivated, are questioned by a reading of the restored *Jour de fête* which demonstrates the use of a meaningful colour design. Thus the restored version presents a non-naturalistic deployment of colour which directs attention to objects and figures associated with a world which is external to the primary rural setting, such as the travelling fair and symbols of modernity like a tractor. In this instance, Tati demonstrates an awareness of colour's potential to present alternative perspectives, bringing meaning to a style which might otherwise go unnoticed. As Clayton demonstrates, both black-and-white and colour versions of the same film operate differently in their strategies of directing attention and meaning. With the option of colour at his disposal, Tati deliberately chose to exploit the variability of colour in its capacity to accent particular objects and figures. While the example differs from Disney's Silly Symphonies, the same principle emerges whereby colour's potential to offer something different and expressive is presented. What we are offered in both case studies are colour formations and associations which depart from those grounded in the conventions of psychological realism established for black and white.

Colour's mutability allows it to be grafted onto new meanings and forms, offering potential for establishing a style or design within the terms of a film or group of films. This is very much the case within the context of postcolonial filmmaking, where colour can be appropriated to destabilize the conventions of 'otherness' and exoticism established through colonial imagery. The association of colour with empire and exotic cultures is apparent from the earliest colour films, and as part of western culture's obsession with 'whiteness'. Batchelor observes that 'colour is made out to be the property of some "foreign" body – usually the feminine, the oriental, the primitive, the infantile, the vulgar, the queer or the pathological'.¹² Jacqueline Maingard's analysis of *Bamako* (Abderrahmane Sissako, Senegal, 2006) demonstrates how the colours and traditions of textile dyeing acquire symbolic resonance in the context of the film's critique of globalization. Coloured cloths form a backdrop to the film's staging of an outdoor trial of international financial institutions. Rather than being incidental or peripheral elements of the mise-en-scene, these cloths assume major significance in underlining the film's political critique. While this example is different from that of *Jour de fête*, colour plays a similar role in establishing the film's worldview. In the spirit of Eisenstein's theorizing, one might even go so far as to argue that mutability of colour is used organically, as the sight of hanging,

12 Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, pp. 22-23.

multicoloured pastel and deeply saturated cloths expresses both the longevity of local tradition and also its contingency.

The final contribution to this dossier considers the challenges posed by digital technologies to prevailing professional roles and methods of working with colour. Digital colour grading, as Richard Misek explains, has become a key area in which colour effects can be manipulated in postproduction to a far greater extent than was possible with photochemical processing. The idea of 'colour control' is as important as ever, but it is spread over a reconfigured workflow with which cinematographers are keen to be involved, as is evident from the activities of the American Society of Cinematographers. Misek's final remarks remind us, however, that outside the province of the feature film the digital environment is potentially revolutionary in its challenge to the way in which colour images are made, viewed and interpreted. In the silent period, applied colour – particularly hand-painted colour – encouraged a similarly open attitude towards experiment. As with early colour animation, technological development can result in a realignment of professional norms, codes and styles. From very different perspectives, theorists such as Eisenstein and Cavell locate dynamic, even unsettling, territory in a world of colour on screen. The 'colour spaces' opened up by the examples discussed in this dossier have the potential to become infinite in the digital world, as well as in critical consciousness.

'The miracle of our century': Sergei Eisenstein, Élie Faure and colour in the Silly Symphonies

KRISTIAN MOEN

Produced by Walt Disney alongside the popular Mickey Mouse series from 1929 until 1939, the short animated films in the Silly Symphonies series presented a range of subjects including fantastic worlds of nature and fairytales. Extending their aesthetic experimentation in animation and music into the novel terrain of colour, they were the first films to be exhibited in three-strip Technicolor with an exclusive two-year contract that began in 1932. Their use of colour has been discussed in terms of containment, narrative and attraction.¹ This essay, however, takes a different approach, exploring – partly through the works of Sergei Eisenstein and Élie Faure – how colour in the Silly Symphonies can be seen as a site of instability and fluidity. For prominent critics, colour was seen not only as a complement to narrative and fantasy but also as a revolution in the form. In his review of an early colour Silly Symphony, *King Neptune* (Burton Gillett, 1932), Emile Vuillermoz describes the impact of colour: 'We are in the presence of a decisive step in the history of this formula of spectacle', one which can 'open for us unimagined horizons'.² René Jeanne at *Le Petit Journal* was similarly enchanted, describing *King Neptune* as 'a little masterpiece of imagination, grace, spirit and poetry'.³ The introduction of colour, on which Jeanne elaborated in his next review of a Silly Symphony, had transformed animation: 'All that has been dry, ugly and often in bad taste in black-and-white animation has disappeared; animation in colour is more supple, more fluid and, far from finding itself diminished, the

- 1 See J. P. Telotte, 'Minor hazards: Disney and the color adventure', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, vol. 21, no. 4 (2004), pp. 273-81; Richard Neupert, 'Painting a plausible world: Disney's color prototypes', in Eric Smoodin (ed.), *Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 106-17; Scott Higgins, 'Technicolor confections', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2007), pp. 274-82; Sean Cubitt, 'Line and colour in *The Band Concert*', *Animation: an Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2009), pp. 11-30.
- 2 Emile Vuillermoz, 'Le Cinéma. Chronique. Indications', *Le Temps*, 14 January 1933. My translation.
- 3 René Jeanne, 'La Critique des films', *Le Petit Journal*, 16 December 1932. My translation.

4 René Jeanne, 'La Critique', *Le Petit Journal*, 27 January 1933. My translation.

5 Sergei Eisenstein, 'On Disney', in Richard Taylor (ed.), *The Eisenstein Collection* (London: Seagull Books, 2006), p. 94.

6 Ibid., p. 88.

7 Sergei Eisenstein, 'On colour', in Michael Glenney and Richard Taylor (eds), *Selected Works, Volume II: Towards a Theory of Montage* (London: British Film Institute, 1991), p. 255.

8 For a detailed examination of Eisenstein's writing on colour, see Eirik Frisvold Hanssen, 'Eisenstein in colour', *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift*, vol. 73, no. 4 (2004), pp. 212–27.

9 Sergei Eisenstein, *Nonindifferent Nature*, trans. Herbert Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 217.

10 Ibid., p. 390.

11 Sergei Eisenstein, 'Colour film', in *Notes of a Film Director* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1959), p. 126.

fantasy which we have the right to demand from films of this genre is singularly enlarged'.⁴

In the notes collected in 'On Disney', written mainly between 1940 and 1941, Eisenstein heralds a range of animated films from the Mickey Mouse series and the Silly Symphonies as offering a powerful challenge to established norms and notions of stability. With the attractiveness of fire, they achieve this through their mutability of form and their depictions of a 'transformed world, a world going out of itself'.⁵ Rather than the 'grey' environment of 'city streets' and 'endless crowds' that restrain and control, animation and colour promise a kind of ecstatic freedom:

That is why Disney's films blaze with colour. Like the patterns of clothes of people who have been deprived of the colours in nature. That is why the imagination in them is limitless, for Disney's films are a revolt against partitioning and legislating, against spiritual stagnation and greyness.⁶

Despite an admiration for these films, Eisenstein is critical of their use of colour. He describes it as 'an amorphous, extraneous element that plays no part in [Disney's] amazing synchronous dance of lines and shapes, melody and rhythm'.⁷ For Eisenstein, these films do not take advantage of the potential to extend the mutability of the body or the musicality of the animated line into the terrain of colour.

Eisenstein's primary criticism is that the Disney films do not use colour as a separate component in their expressions of mutability.⁸ In *Nonindifferent Nature*, Eisenstein writes of how aesthetic elements in films could overlap and correspond in multiple expressive ways:

The silent film wrote music for itself. Plastic music. And this was a peculiar form of 'being beside itself,' an escape into another dimension. ... The greatest share in 'making sound' fell to landscape. For landscape is the freest element of film, the least burdened with servile, narrative tasks, and the most flexible in conveying moods, emotional states, and spiritual experiences.⁹

Just as landscape could be freed from the constraints of narrative and representation, becoming 'music', so could colour. Writing about Disney's *Bambi* (1942), which he criticizes for its failures in colour design, Eisenstein notes that 'one should have confined oneself to the soft dissolution of forms in the setting and background, able to pass one into the other and repeat the change of moods, and by this flow, create genuinely plastic music'.¹⁰ Foreground, background, landscape, music and colour should not take place in separate spheres, but should instead be aesthetically integrated. This would not be a matter of colour simply matching or embellishing other elements; rather, its shifting figurations could participate in what Eisenstein describes as a 'colour line'. He writes that 'It's no use tackling colour-film production unless we feel that the "line" of colour movement through the film progresses as independently as the "line" of music which passes through the entire film'.¹¹ Employing

colour as separate from its objects, one can ‘unfold an inner drama’ of chromaticity, running alongside and through music and landscape. A central trope of Eisenstein’s later writing is that nature and the world are not static, but instead open to a process of change. Colour could contribute to this vision of a mutable and fluid world.

While Eisenstein is largely dismissive of the use of colour in the Silly Symphonies, there are prominent instances where these films do use colour in ways that resonate with his concerns. Some of the Silly Symphonies draw attention to the fluidity of colour by connecting it to music. The background for titles in the black-and-white Silly Symphonies prominently display musical notes, emphasizing the synchronization of sound and image that is a central feature of the form. For a short period soon after the introduction of colour, in films such as *Old King Cole* (David Hand, 1933) and *The Pied Piper* (Wilfred Jackson, 1933), this is replaced with the image of a multicoloured curtain which slowly changes from a blueish to a reddish hue. An appropriate introduction to the multicoloured visions of the films, this is followed with the title of the film framed by a prism of colours. Both changing and merging, the fluidity of colour is highlighted. Moreover, by replacing the image of multiple notes with shifting hues, such introductions point to both a novel attraction and a shared ground for music and colour.

The transformation of colour is also a structuring element in several Silly Symphonies which use a ‘colour line’, where chromatic emphases shift over the course of a film. For example, *Father Noah’s Ark* (Wilfred Jackson, 1933) begins with colourful images of animals, a bounty of food and the characters’ costumes. This multiplicity of colour becomes disrupted by the deluge, whereupon the chromatic emphasis shifts to primary colours: the blue of the water and rain and the yellow of the sun and the ark. The film concludes with a rainbow behind the ark, recapturing a harmony of multiple colours to coincide with the rescue of the animals. J. P. Telotte describes similar colour structures in other Silly Symphonies, including *Flowers and Trees* (Burton Gillett, 1932), which also ends with a rainbow, and *Babes in the Woods* (Burton Gillett, 1932), in which the absence and transformation of colour is highlighted.¹² This takes on a specifically musical connotation in *Music Land* (Wilfred Jackson, 1935). As the artillery of the ‘Land of Symphony’ and the ‘Isle of Jazz’ exchange fire, multicoloured musical notes emerge from their military instruments (a pipe organ and a horn section). At the end of the film, when the two islands have found peace with a ‘Bridge of Harmony’, a rainbow frames the image of togetherness. Multicoloured notes float in the sky like confetti. Merging different styles of music and different colours, the rainbow functions as a metaphor for visual and aural harmony. The entwinement of colour design with the structure of Disney films would continue beyond the 1930s. For example, recounting the planning for a sequence in *Fantasia* (1940), Robert D. Field writes: ‘Before the narrative pattern was completed in any great detail, an overall color scheme was worked out in sympathy with the general mood of the

¹² Telotte, ‘Minor hazards’, pp. 277–78.

- 13 Robert D. Field, *The Art of Walt Disney* (London: Collins, 1944), p. 169.

music and patterned to correspond with the development of the subject matter'.¹³

As well as occasionally structuring the unfolding of the film through different emphases on changing and harmonious colours, several Silly Symphonies demonstrate the refiguration of colour *within* the landscape as a central trope of their emergent animate worlds. *Funny Little Bunnies* (Wilfred Jackson, 1934) offers one example of this. The film begins in a predominantly green landscape, with multicoloured flowers in the fields, a rainbow, and fluttering colourful birds. Large lilies are in the foreground, and from behind them emerges a pair of rabbits. Acting as guides, the rabbits lead us to a curtain of leaves which they pull back to reveal a passageway, opening onto a hidden animate world in which anthropomorphized bunnies decorate brightly coloured Easter chocolates. Here colour becomes intensified and tangible as the worker bunnies dip their paintbrushes in a rainbow. Having emerged out of a more naturalistic landscape, colour has been figuratively transformed from rainbows into sweets and from Easter lilies into Easter bunnies. Another example of this animation through colour is evident in *Water Babies* (Wilfred Jackson, 1935). The film begins with the image of a pond, as day is breaking. Unveiling progressively brighter colours, the green leaves of water lilies open to reveal purple flowers, which then open to show the pink 'water babies' asleep inside them. These enchanted children wake and go on to play fantastically in an animate world of nature. The film ends with the water babies safely ensconced back in their lilypads at night, the world of animate landscape and brilliant colour having drawn to a close.

In these and other Silly Symphonies, colour is more than a motif or embellishment: it is an aesthetic and expressive element that figures the fluidity of musicality, landscape and transformation. While Eisenstein may not have had these specific examples of the Silly Symphonies in mind when criticizing the use of colour in Disney films, the approach in his later writing is more broadly concerned with how such films lack a sufficient integration of colour into their aesthetic whole. Writing in 1937, the French art historian and cultural commentator Élie Faure draws upon a set of concerns related to Eisenstein's, emphasizing a similar potential in the use of colour as an integral aesthetic element of animated films. Faure, however, offers a much more sympathetic view. Reflecting on the significance of animated films, and particularly the Silly Symphonies, Faure begins by comparing them to expressions of the 'poetic genius of mankind' such as Italian frescoes and French cathedrals.¹⁴ Rather than moving art towards a religious or spiritual ideal, however,

It is quite moving to see that in this regard it is America, so disdainful of 'intellectuals', so 'materialist', so serving the 'economic' who, in the sublime disorder of the modern world ... brings this fantastic imagination, this rhythmic verve, this flame of poetry drunk on liberty, joy, malice, ceaselessly lively invention.¹⁵

- 14 Élie Faure, 'Cinéma', in Jean-Jacques Pauvert (ed.), *Oeuvres complètes d'Élie Faure* (Lausanne: Société française des Presses suisses, 1964), p. 863. My translation.

- 15 Ibid. My translation.

16 Ibid. My translation.

17 Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables*, trans. Emiliano Battista (Oxford: Berg, 2006), p. 177.

18 Ibid.

19 Faure, 'Cinéma', p. 863.

20 Ibid. My translation.

Faure goes on to describe the diverse range of subjects shown in such films, ranging from buds in the field to mechanical toys. He describes animated film as offering an 'enormous poetic awakening of these abundant multitudes', which had until recently been largely 'invisible and inert'.¹⁶ The Silly Symphonies offer a compendium of sorts, animating a world of animals, environments and things. Jacques Rancière has described how a seemingly very different compendium of images, *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1988-98), is heavily indebted to Faure's approach. Rancière explains how the film 'reroutes' a text on Rembrandt written by Faure in order to situate cinema in a 'pictorial tradition'.¹⁷ This tradition breaks with longstanding hierarchies of genres and subjects, and evokes 'the intertwined multiplicity of epochs, gestures, objects, and symbols of ordinary human life, of the different ages of life and of the handing down of its forms'.¹⁸ Faure's discussion situates animated film as a key site through which to show such a multiplicity of forms and subjects.

Colour could play a pivotal role in such a vision. Like Eisenstein, Faure argues that colour should not simply be added to films: 'It is not enough to have integrated this great discovery [of colour film] to the total expression of life that the cinema promises to be in order to imagine that there is nothing left to do in this sense'.¹⁹ He then outlines ways in which colour demands 'new efforts', particularly in terms of showing the exterior world. Effectively using colour is not a matter of copying nature, as nature is not harmonious; nor can colour simply be transposed onto previous aesthetic forms, as it functions independently of the values of black and white. Rather, colour films – and particularly those which display the kind of multiplicity of animate nature and shifting forms as the Disney films – demand a complex harmony of colour and colour-relations, 'ceaselessly modifying their relationships'.²⁰ In such a vision, animated films can be seen as a compendium of living creatures, animate beings, gestures and tones constantly changing their relations and transforming through colour.

A late Silly Symphony, *The Old Mill* (Wilfred Jackson, 1937), integrates its use of colour with a perception of the world as a place of intertwined transformation and multiplicity. The film begins with the image of a disused mill upon the horizon, casting a reflection in a pond (figure 3; dossier illustrations on p. 396). Leaves and bullrushes frame the image in the foreground, where a spider makes its web. As the film progresses, it shows the various animals who live in and around the mill; their nightly activities are disrupted, however, by a powerful storm. The film ends much as it began, with the same framing of the mill, still standing, though appearing rather worn by the night's storm. Here, light glistens off the spider's web and the blueish tint of the sky, while the water dominates the colour tone. The mill's place in the world is not static, and the sense of transformation is evoked primarily through colour. Unlike the earlier black-and-white Silly Symphony, *Night* (Disney, 1930), from which the design of these images is borrowed, *The Old Mill* evokes transformation through subtle changes in colour. *Night* presents a much

- 21 Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 2nd ed. (London: British Film Institute, 1993), p. 16.

more anthropomorphic and animate world in which bullrushes and ripples in the pond take on a life of their own as they sway to the music, forming lines that dance in front of our eyes. In *The Old Mill*, it is not the mutability of the line but that of the colour which expresses the transforming world.

As well as being structured around a sense of colour's transformation, the film also presents a sequence in which sound and colour merge. As a frog begins to croak its song, other frogs join in, creating an amphibious version of what Jane Feuer describes as the 'passed-along song' of the musical.²¹ This then extends to the crickets, sweeping their legs in time with the rhythm. This music transforms into colour when we are shown the wider environment: fireflies hover above the pond, casting yellow daubs of flickering light, enlarging and disappearing in time to the croaking and the music. When the sequence returns to the frog in the pond, he catches one of these fireflies with his tongue and swallows it. As he continues to croak his song, his white belly is illuminated by the firefly with each sound he makes. As the animals in the environment overlap in song and image through an aesthetics of sound and colour, the scene creates a sense of an interconnected ecosystem that draws together different facets of nature.

This figuration of an interconnected world through colour is also developed in another way in the film. Following the 'colour line' of the sparingly used reddish range leads to a developing visual motif that interconnects the film's world. Before the sequence in which the frogs and other animals perform their nighttime song, the film shows pink water lilies in the pond, with beams of light shining down upon them. The beams of light slowly narrow and vanish, the water lilies close up for the evening, and their bright pinks are covered by green leaves. The scene recalls *The Water Babies*, with its pink babies nestled in the lily pads. *The Old Mill* shows this pink in a more natural mode, alluding to Monet's water lilies, but then goes on to rhyme it chromatically with the pink webbed feet of a frog, which emerges from under the water. The effect of the changing conditions of light is shown as the frog's feet change from pink to orange as it exits the water, jumping onto a lily pad. A similar effect of light and colour is shown in a previous scene, in which the twilight shines through the wings of bats as they stretch, illuminating them with an orange hue. This also evokes the illumination of the blades of the windmill against the evening sky. In the opening scene, the sky has a pinkish-orange hue; this becomes rhymed with the movement of a bird swooping across the image to perch upon a branch. The bird's pink underbelly offers the first gesture of flight within the film, an animate vision of the sunset. The film uses the 'colour line' of reddish hues to rhyme different kinds of movements, gestures and effects of light. From the flight of a bird to the leap of a frog, from the outstretched wing of a bat to the blade of a windmill, this world is interconnected through colour. This creates an effect which resonates with Faure's approach, capturing the 'quasi-abstract play of light and shadow to capture the essential gestures and emotions of everyday life'.²² Like many of the Silly Symphonies, *The Old*

- 22 Rancière, *Film Fables*, p. 176.

Mill employs colour as a site of fluidity running through the movements of nature, the merging of sound and colour, and the gradations of change.

Within the pixels of contemporary animation, such a fluidity of colour is still a prominent element. We see the visualization of synaesthesia as Remy the culinary rat savours the taste of strawberry and cheese in *Ratatouille* (Brad Bird and Jan Pinkava, 2007), while colours flicker, transform and explode against a black background. The multicoloured balloons in *Up* (Pete Docter and Bob Peterson, 2009) become entwined with the feeling of escape, adventure and hope. In *Wall-E* (Andrew Stanton, 2008), the ‘colour line’ of green becomes a central visual and thematic motif. Virtually absent from the film’s colour design, it becomes pronounced at certain moments, linking Wall-E’s solar charge panel with EVE’s illuminated plant icon and visually connecting both their hearts with the sole remaining plant on a desiccated Earth. This culminates in a concluding image of a verdant natural world that is beginning to reemerge. Although no longer a technological novelty, colour in animation continues to be entwined with the fluidity of change, the merging of senses, the natural world and the figuration of transformative potentials. Eisenstein captures this sense of colour’s potential when he recounts ‘the unique effect of the ancient stained-glass windows of Chartres Cathedral’.²³ He writes of how colour streamed through the windows, merging its gradations into a blinding totality while also showing subtle shifts over the course of the day. This was not only an optical effect for Eisenstein, but a vision of the entire world: ‘The spectrum of the stained-glass windows ... appears to be a synthesis of the whole coloured diversity of what surrounds a Gothic cathedral’, which includes ‘eternally changing nature’ and ‘the colored variety of France’.²⁴ This vision of colour is, for Eisenstein, cinematic:

And, of course, only the miracle of our century – color film, which occurs between the momentariness of fireworks and the slow movement of the sunlit day around the cathedral – will be able with equal fascination to bring the viewer all the pathos of a color symphony.²⁵

²³ Eisenstein, *Nonindifferent Nature*, p. 106.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

The arrival of colour: responding to the restored *Jour de fête*

ALEX CLAYTON

¹ These notes are based on observation of various DVD releases, including the 2009 British Film Institute's *Jacques Tati Collection* DVD and Atlantic Film's 2004 two-disc release containing black-and-white and colour versions. DVD is the format in which the restored version is likely to have been most widely seen. An occupational hazard when analyzing colour is the likelihood of variation between different formats and screening situations. This should encourage caution in the close reading of colour, but should not be an excuse to abandon it altogether.

² See, for instance, David Bellos, *Jacques Tati: His Life and Art* (London: Harvill Press, 1999); Dudley Andrew, 'The postwar struggle for color', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1979), pp. 41-52; François Ede, *Jour de fête, ou la couleur retrouvée* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma Livres, 1995).

There is a charming visual joke in Jacques Tati's first feature film *Jour de fête* (originally released in 1949; rereleased in modified form in 1964; finally restored with colour in 1995). It is very slight, barely a gag but charming nonetheless, and was entirely hidden for nearly half a century, like a time capsule waiting to be unearthed. Discovered only after Tati's death, it appears as the last warm wink from a director with a fondness for comic obliqueness and a reputation, particularly in his later work, for hiding amusing details in easily-missed corners of his films. Though now visible, it might still pass us by. As the residents of a provincial town and its surrounding area journey into a central square to partake in festival day celebrations, four well-turned-out young women in clothes worn especially for the occasion turn a corner under an arched entrance to the dusty plaza. Discernible through the archway is the French national flag, raised high and fluttering as a beacon to the citizenry. But that will be as nothing once these ladies hit the square. Arm-in-arm, with dazzling white blouses in the middle, and blue and red summer dresses at either side, the procession is arranged as a rival tricolour – blue, white and red in a line – a lively vision to upstage that limp and meagre cloth.

This detail gains its quiet charm from the relative lack of insistence upon its recognition. Unassuming and missable as it is, it was invisible until the restoration of *Jour de fête*'s original colour negatives in 1995.¹ The circumstances which led Tati to take the precaution of shooting with two cameras side by side – one stocked with lenticular film for colour, the other with black-and-white film as a backup – have been detailed by several film historians.² The early ambition, when shooting began in

1947, was no less than that *Jour de fête* should become France's first full-colour feature. Employing a rather convoluted additive process known as Thomsoncolor, it was hoped the film would showcase a cheap and viable home-grown alternative to US-controlled Technicolor. The film was thus envisaged and designed with colour in mind, but it was uncertain at the time of shooting whether resources and technology would permit the realization of a Thomsoncolor print. The decision to shoot additionally in black and white was taken as an insurance measure. This must have proved irksome for the filmmakers, but, as it turned out, the precaution was well advised: in 1949 it was the 'backup' version that was released and that became a popular success.

This was the black-and-white version seen by André Bazin, who praised the film for its originality as working within the vein of silent film comedy, and whose critical writings have shaped the enduring reputation of Tati as a director whose compositions encourage the eye to 'roam, wander and gambol about the screen'.³ It was also the version saluted by the *Cahiers du cinéma* collective who retrospectively declared, in May 1957, that with *Jour de fête* 'French neorealism was born'.⁴ Yet it is clear that colour was important to Tati's conception of how the film should work. The film's original cinematographer, François Ede (along with Tati's daughter Sophie Tatischeff, a key figure in the restoration), has said that plans for the film involved an intuitive wish to refuse a naturalistic conception of colour, and that Thomsoncolor's inherent technical faults effectively served this wish.⁵ According to David Bellos, the guiding idea for Tati was to use colour to accent the transient fun of the fair so that, in Tati's words, 'the travelling showmen and their accessories should bring colour to the place'.⁶ Such an idea involved actively *reducing* the existing range of colour in the location setting for the contrast to emerge. Apparently Tati had existing town buildings repainted in duller shades of brown and grey, eschewing a more conventionally romantic depiction of agrarian bounty (the town appears more dusty backwater than rural idyll) and signalling that Tati's interest in non-interventionist documentation was slighter than the *Cahiers* label of 'neorealism' might imply. In a similar vein, Ede reports that Tati was concerned that the fields of the surrounding countryside might appear *too* green, and that such an appearance of lushness should be avoided.⁷ While we do not know whether Tati was to see prototypes for how the colour images might turn out,⁸ the restoration (undertaken with the sincere ambition of producing what the film *would have* looked like, not of ironing out 'flaws' in the Thomsoncolor stock) provides further evidence for the active dampening and rarefication of colour, even during sequences depicting festivities in full swing. Such a strategy could seem a perverse refusal of the chance to showcase the virtues and possibilities of home-grown cinema technology. Rather than depicting the fair as a riot of colour, its comparative vivacity is presented with a peppering of moderately saturated tricolour accents on single objects, as if the town were apprehensive and piecemeal in its provisional absorption of festive colours.

3 Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Tati's democracy: an interview and introduction', *Film Comment*, May-June 1973, p. 16, <<http://www.jonathanrosenbaum.com/?p=15628>> [accessed 20 September 2010].

4 *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 70 (1957), p. 63.

5 Ede, *Jour de fête*, p. 79.

6 Bellos, *Jacques Tati*, p. 110.

7 Ede, *Jour de fête*, p. 63.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 79.

The colour version, more palpably than the black-and-white one, affords the impression that the fair is an outside influence ambivalently accommodated by the establishment. Sophie Tatischeff's editing of the restored colour negatives follows very closely the structure and rhythms of the 1949 cut (often using apparently the same takes as the earlier version, shot from almost identical angles), so comparing sequences from each, side by side, is helpful in pinpointing how colour can shape effect and meaning and direct our view differently. Both versions open with shots of the showmen's tractor and wagon, stocked with fairground horses and trundling along on its roundabout route into town. In the black-and-white film, the event is shaped as a joyful procession through the use of chirpy nondiegetic music, the buoyant quality of sunlight, and the growing band of excited children following its passage towards the town centre. In the restored version, the effect is supplemented by the tractor's handsome orange-red colour, which stands out from murky green hedgerow and dry fields, and from the ashen walls and sandy-brown speckled roofs as it pulls into the dusty square. At this point, rather than simply parking, the tractor circles around the town cross, a sober stone monument flanked by grey stone steps. The dash of colour provided by the tractor considerably alters the composition from the black-and-white version. What appeared a respectful orbit around the monument now seems a lively challenge to the existing order. Where once the monument had been the town's congregational nucleus, the tractor provides a contending centre of focus (see figures 1 and 2).

The impact of the fair's arrival is portrayed differently again, and more impressionistically, in a modified, partially coloured version released in 1964. Here certain items – emblems of the fair such as flags, garlands and balloons – appear in primary colours etched directly onto the film, producing a bold and curious effect that for some might hark back to the stencil effects of the silent era. The device is motivated by way of some additional black-and-white footage (shot in the early 1960s but integrated carefully into the existing cut) of a visiting painter wandering around the town and witnessing proceedings with an air of affectionate detachment. When this *flanêur* snaps open his watercolours and begins to paint, select aspects of the world around him appear injected with the colours he applies to his sketchpad. In this version, colour more obtrusively proclaims the fair's vivification of the town, but only as seen through the eyes of a non-resident observer (joining an already existing network of detached onlookers within the film). Even in sequences from which the young painter is absent, the occurrence of bold primary colours on the occasional flag or garland, for instance, invokes an outsider's viewpoint, yielding a notion of colour perception as both partial and produced by social standpoint rather than as an automatic registration of the external world.

The strategy is telling, and may help us understand Ede's comment that Thomsoncolor's technical defects might have been somehow providential for Tati's purpose, or that they at least furnished an inclination towards a

non-naturalistic use of colour. Many of the images in the restored version seem overexposed – perhaps as a result of the need to work with a very wide aperture to allow enough light through to the chromatic filter – with white objects appearing especially and unnaturally brilliant. Defect it may be, but the film’s radiance of white contributes memorably to a touching vignette in which a father struggles to get into a grubby cart whilst holding aloft his child’s white shirt, newly washed, spotless and ready for the fair. Elsewhere, blurred fringes make one dimly conscious of the *mediation* of colour and light, counterbalancing, in a manner analogous to the stencil effects of the 1964 version, the film’s window-on-the-world aesthetic. Moreover, even though the colour in the restored version is not technically an addition, colour still feels somehow applied and contrived, an appendage to the image rather than an inherent quality of the object. Even with the footage of the painter now absent, the film’s desaturated colours, together with its attachment to rural whimsy, can be felt to invoke the medium of painting – more specifically the faded prints of pastoral watercolours, perhaps. Elsewhere, in some of the more radiant close shots, such as that of the girl who takes her chances at the fortune wheel, an almost translucent, backlit quality may more strongly recall turn-of-the-century autochrome photography. In either case, connotations of quaint pastness resulting from the invocation of outdated media help to characterize the film’s fond perspective upon its world, even as much of that world itself is quite gloomily decorated.

The association with painting is strengthened by an ‘artisanal’ use of colour which Jonathan Rosenbaum has identified as consisting of ‘little dabs and touches’ as opposed to ‘the Hollywood factory notion of applying sheets or slabs of color’.⁹ The metaphor of the paintbrush, while often ill-fitting for filmmakers, seems somewhat apt in relation to Tati, who sometimes appealed in interviews to the idea of filmmaker-as-painter as an emblem for his meticulousness as a director,¹⁰ and whose visual arrangements, particularly in later work, often draw attention to their surface composition, recalling abstract painters such as Mondrian. It is similarly in this later work that the method of ‘spot-daubing’ – one or two single-coloured objects picked out in bright hue from a more monochromatic backdrop – is most notable; but the 1995 restoration now reveals it as a strategy even in Tati’s first feature. Bellos notes that Tati’s early apprenticeship in the picture framing business allowed the director to gain a familiarity with classical and contemporary European art.¹¹ It is therefore plausible to think that Tati may have taken inspiration from a painter like Monet, whose *Painting by the Edge of a Wood* (1885), for instance, deploys an analogous compositional technique, the rich blue of the painter’s smock and the yellow fleck of the woman’s hat standing out and vivifying one another against a relatively murky ground.

The sequence in the colour version of *Jour de fête* in which François the postman (played by Tati) first visits the town’s café during festival day offers several examples of this technique. The colour scheme of this busy interior is dominated by black, greys and a muted tangerine-brown, with

9 Jonathan Rosenbaum, ‘The colour of paradise’, *Chicago Reader*, 16 January 1998, <<http://www.jonathanrosenbaum.com/?p=6589>> [accessed 20 September 2010].

10 Bellos, *Jacques Tati*, p. 262.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

the shots arranged to offer the occasional glimpse of (mild) blue or (desaturated) red. Still ostensibly on his postal round, François underlines his entrance to the cafe with a series of mildly pompous, loose-limbed salutes to one and all (most of whom are not interested). Our attention in this shot is likely to flit variously between the postman's mobile gestures, the passage of a couple of revellers around him (one of whom blows a party horn noisily), and a floating spot of pastel blue on the lefthand side of the frame (a solitary balloon tied to the chair of a patron near the door). Consonant with the wider theme of the postman being sidetracked, François begins to walk over to join a couple of acquaintances at the bar, frame-right, but then seems to decide to do something in the other direction and is temporarily torn between the two locations. It turns out that a letter is due to the cigar-smoking patron who sits on the chair with the balloon. The film cuts to a reverse angle, with the blue balloon now much more prominent, as François reaches into his satchel to fetch the letter. Forcibly turning the patron's head with his hand to see it, he causes the man's cigar to burst the adjacent balloon, removing that blue patch instantly from the image. At the same moment, visible in the background frame-left is another spot of blue – chiming with the now departed balloon – this time a soda siphon sitting next to the postman's waiting acquaintances. As François saunters back to his companions at the bar, there is a cut to a reverse-angle three-shot in which the greater prominence of this object, though placed bottom-left of the frame, calls again for our attention ahead of its usage a moment later: with François once again diverted, one of the companions amuses himself by spraying a jet of soda into the postman's satchel.

The use of blue balloon and blue soda siphon here contributes to a pattern in which peripheral elements repeatedly claim our visual attention. This may be felt to chime with Kristin Thompson's claim that Tati's style (particularly in *Playtime*) is 'parametric', foregrounding abstract and essentially non-meaningful patterns for their own sake.¹² On the other hand, the colour *organization* here (as distinct from colour symbolism) can be seen as contributing an oblique articulation of the film's principal themes. In drawing the eye towards peripheral details, the use of colour links the viewer's experience of visual diversion to the film's thematic interest in distraction and peripherality. Moments later in the same cafe scene, we hear the resident honky-tonk pianola stutter and grind to a halt, and there is a cut to a new angle which gives the first clear view of an adjacent back room packed with revellers eager to continue dancing. François steps up to fix the machine; we see him tinker with the handle, push the button, and finally give the machine a good thump. This works, and as the revellers start dancing again in the back room he does a little celebratory dance on his own. Black-and-white and colour versions use very similar takes for this shot, and a comparison is useful for pinpointing the role of colour. In the black-and-white version, all eyes are on François the music-fixer as he becomes, for a rare moment, the centre of attention; when he does his triumphant jig, he dances centre-stage against a

¹² Kristin Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

backdrop of undifferentiated jostling figures. In the restored version, François's accomplishment is more ambivalently located: within a colour scheme of browns and blacks, the presence of a female dancer in the centre of the frame, a figure picked out by her red hat and blouse, and the materialization of another blue balloon floating up from amongst the crowd are pronounced, and these strongly marked elements divert one's attention from the postman's activity and emphasize, by virtue of relief, his off-centre position in the frame. Finally, as François begins his solo dance in the foreground and the camera holds on the scene, the carefully arranged flashes of blue balloon and red hat in the dancing crowd accentuate its swirling, circular movement around an unseen centre – to which his little solo dance now becomes a satellite.

This moment, as with the others I discuss above, allows us to see how colour supports the film's interest in peripheral placements, in circular or orbital movements, and in the unspoken competition between rival centres. So just as the fair's arrival provides a shift in focus for the town, the arrival of colour following the restoration of *Jour de fête* may shift our understanding of the film's project. Had colour been available to the film in 1949, might Bazin have perceived a tendency towards non-centralist organization of the image as a greater departure from the conventions of silent comedy? Would the invocation of painting, together with the sense of a world sketched and contrived in colour, have curbed the impression of a non-demonstrative, observational style sufficient for the *Cahiers* collective to place the film differently in relation to neorealism? Unanswerable as these questions may be, a clearer picture of Tati's directive use of colour – the way colour prioritizes and draws our eye around the frame – should qualify his reputation as a director whose compositions instigate a freeform wandering of the gaze. It should also sharpen our understanding of how the perceptual urgings of colour can significantly shape our encounter with a film and our sense of its world..



Fig. 1. Jacques Tati's *Jour de fête* in its original 1949 format.



Fig. 2. The 1995 colour restoration by Sophie Tatischeff and François Ede.



Fig. 3. *The Old Mill* (Wilfred Jackson, 1937) evokes transformation through colour.



Fig. 4. The emblematic ochre-orange of Sissako's *Bamako* (2006).



Fig. 5. The comic-book aesthetic of Zack Snyder's *300* (2006).

Screening Africa in colour: Abderrahmane Sissako's *Bamako*

JACQUELINE MAINGARD

When film technology expanded with the development of Technicolor in the 1930s, colour was appropriated to advance the colonial imaging and imagining of Africa already exoticized in early cinema. Zoltan Korda's imperial film *The Four Feathers* (1939), filmed in Technicolor and shot on location in Africa, is an example of this trend. Since the 1960s, African filmmakers from post-independent sub-Saharan countries, particularly Ousmane Sembene, Djibril Diop Mambéty and Abderrahmane Sissako, have appropriated colour as a means of claiming new and alternative visions of African social realities and identities. Sembene's first feature film, *Mandabi/The Money Order* (1968), was filmed in vivid colour and opens with closeup images of barbers on the roadside at work shaving their customers, among them Ibrahima Dieng (Makhouredia Gueye), recipient of the money order from his nephew Abdou in Paris. As David Murphy comments, 'this beautifully filmed sequence is not intended as a piece of tourist exotica';¹ rather, when Dieng pays the barber at the end of the sequence it becomes clear that it has described a financial transaction, situating the film's thematic concerns in relation to the 'urban African poor'.² Interestingly, Sembene almost made the film in black and white as he was concerned that 'audiences (particularly in the West) would become blinded by the vivid colours of the African city and forget about the social and political concerns of his narrative'.³ His deployment of cinematic techniques and aesthetics thus served his ideological purpose of exposing and challenging the dominant discourses of his society. His use of colour in *Xala/The Curse* (1974), for example, layers his narrative's critique of neocolonialism in Senegal. This is visible in the mise-en-scene through

¹ David Murphy, *Sembene: Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction* (Oxford and Trenton, NJ: James Currey and Africa World Press, 2000), p. 88.

² *Ibid.*, p. 97.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

the costumes of the women, including the white, western-style wedding dress of El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye's (Thierno Leye) third wife Ngoné. We see it also in the juxtaposition of the colours of the political (that is, divided) and united maps of Africa, the latter matching the colours of the dress of his daughter Rama (Miriam Niang), who embodies an alternative, radical vision of Africa. Like Sembene, Mambéty uses colour to create an aesthetic that embellishes narrative meaning. In *Badou Boy* (1970), for example, the bleached-out quality of the colour levels, dotted occasionally by saturated elements such as a red fez or a glimpse of orange clothing hanging on a line, reinforces the film's surreality. While Sembene is often seen as a social realist and Mambéty as an experimental, avant-gardist, the latter's films are as socially conscious and ideologically constructed as those of Sembene. Their different approaches to colour in the late 1960s and early 1970s underline the diversity within African filmmaking and its aesthetics from this early period, when Sembene and Mambéty first began to make films.

The legacies of both these filmmakers are apparent in Sissako's films, including *La Vie sur terre/Life on Earth* (1998), *Heremakono/Waiting for Happiness* (2002) and *Bamako* (2006). In *Bamako*, the focus of this essay, Sissako creates a powerful critique of globalization and its effects on a local African community, which acts as a metaphor for the impossibility of global economic policies from the African perspective. Like Sembene and Mambéty before him, Sissako engages colour as an integral component of the film's narrative development to advance his social and political commentary. *Bamako*'s use of colour is designed as a key aesthetic and thematic feature, appropriated into the film's critique of the structural adjustment programmes of international financial institutions and their erosion of local economies in the 'global south'. Sissako ascribes central significance to the local community's cloth-dyeing process through this deployment of colour, filmed by cinematographer Jacques Besse, with whom he worked on three of his earlier films.⁴ The full-screen central image of the ochre-orange cloth hanging up in the courtyard to dry metaphorically represents Africa's fragility. Orange is repeated thematically and aesthetically in other smaller elements of the film's colouration as a repeated reminder of the connectivity between individuals and broader common humanity, as well as the ongoing erosion of Africa's resources.

Bamako – also known as *La Cour*, meaning both 'courtyard' and 'court' – is neither fiction nor documentary, and is perhaps best described as a fictional documentary. Sissako stages an outdoor court in the domestic courtyard of his childhood that brings to trial international financial institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The case is presided over by a panel of judges, with lawyers representing African civil society on one side and international financial institutions on the other. The film plays with the boundary between historical reality and fictional construction by mixing professional lawyers with actors. The black robes and white collars of the lawyers are offset by

4 Jacques Besse also worked with Mambéty on his short film *La petite vendeuse de soleil* (1999).

the bright red robe, trimmed with pale fur, of the Presiding Judge (Hameye Mahalmdane). The two judges at either end of the table wear flamboyant scarves, one gold and one blue. The six witnesses for civil society include a peasant farmer, a teacher, a migrant and the former Malian Minister of Culture, each separately identified by the style and colour of their costumes.

In addition to the key place of ochre-orange in the film's colour design, Sissako's narrative employs a broad colour palette of both pale, pastel shades and strongly saturated primary colours, particularly reds and blues. The natural colour of the courtyard is a muted pale sepia, derived from the mud that forms the basis of its interior and exterior walls and its floor. Parts of it have been painted over in the past and these now pale orange and blue washes form the backdrop that often frames images of witnesses at the stand or of trial spectators. Clothes put out to dry and cloths that have been dyed are draped over washing lines both within and without the courtyard, creating a *mise-en-scene* of a multicoloured (and multipatterned) patchwork. Colour is integral to the life of the courtyard, particularly in the cloth-dyeing processes that feature constantly in the background and are occasionally brought to the foreground, overseen by Sambara (Hélène Diarra). This form of microeconomics is juxtaposed with the macroeconomics of the international financial institutions critiqued by the film. Growing and picking cotton, as well as making, weaving and dyeing cloth, has traditionally been central to some African communities, and has deeply embedded cultural significance as well as providing a form of exchange in local economies. The centrality of this activity is driven home in the film by the fact that virtually everyone's clothes are clearly made from cloth that is dyed in this way. Sissako shows us the raw cotton being woven by one of the courtyard elders and a young girl, straddling generations in a way that underlines this activity's long-term significance. We also see the undyed, white cloth held up for Sambara to decide which colour should be used. Through the trial's testimonies it becomes clear that global financial policies are squeezing out these forms of local economic enterprise, sapping African society of its locally based forms of livelihood as well as its cultural heritage. The colourful cloths that frame the trial are thus a constant reminder of the detrimental effects of globalization.

While the trial appears to take centre stage throughout, with Sissako interweaving the quotidian through and around it, it is in fact imposed on the routine lives of the courtyard's inhabitants, dominating the courtyard space. This is emphasized by the Presiding Judge's red robe hanging in one of the courtyard dwellings when the court is adjourned, alongside the other garments of the lawyers and the documents and files related to the trial itself. As a key emblem of the trial, it is thus seen to penetrate the privatized, domestic space of the courtyard inhabitants. While their everyday lives must continue as normal – washing, dressing, cooking and caring for children and the sick – these activities are interrupted by the trial's proceedings. The interruptions are represented by medium closeup

images of individuals or groups that appear as portrait-like photographic stills, the subjects' gaze often directed straight at, or just off, camera. Each person is dressed in different combinations of dyed cloth, framed by colourful architectural features such as doors or frames or else by clothing and cloth hanging on the washing lines that crisscross the courtyard. These photographic inserts create a kind of audience embedded within the film's narrative with which spectators in the cinema can identify, drawn into the courtyard space to watch and listen alongside local inhabitants.

While the trial proceeds, the disintegration of the marriage between Melé (Aïssa Maïga), a beautiful nightclub singer, and Chaka (Tiécoura Traoré), who is unemployed and cares for their child Ina, is given some prominence. The film's overall narrative is haunted by Chaka's loneliness and mental anguish, which culminate in his suicide towards the end of the film. The deep gulf between Melé and Chaka is represented by differences in the colour of their clothes: she always wears vibrant colours, primarily orange but also bright yellows and blues, in contrast to the bleached-out, pastel grey, floral pattern of Chaka's shirt or his long grey prayer robe. He blends into the courtyard's background while Melé inhabits the foreground. She intermittently stops the court proceedings to have her dress tied up at the back. On one occasion a closeup shot shows the hands of the young man she calls each time to help her, tying the brightly coloured maroon and yellow straps into a bow against her skin, a normally intimate gesture within the domestic space that becomes eroticized as public display. At other times she crosses the courtyard to wash at the communal tap, a bright orange cloth tied around her while her shoulders remain bare. This contrast in the colours of their clothes underlines Chaka's pensive interiority, while Melé displays a sexualized confidence that is ultimately rather empty. We see her dancing at the nightclub with a man slightly shorter than herself, gazing vacantly over his shoulder towards the camera. This could be read as a nod towards Sembene's satirical representation of neocolonialism in *Xala*, in which a similar scene at El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye's wedding shows his second wife dancing with the President, who is much shorter than she. Towards the end of the trial, however, the camera holds Melé's face in closeup, tears streaming down her cheeks as she sings into the microphone at the nightclub. While previously she has appeared disaffected, now she embodies the pain of all she has witnessed as well as the demise of her marriage. This is made more poignant by the ochre-coloured wall that fills the background of the screen, against which her tearful face is foregrounded (figure 4). The emblematic ochre-orange colour creates a link to the cloth hanging across the courtyard (and the screen) and inextricably binds Melé's expression of personal and communal pain into the film's critique of globalization.

As in Sissako's earlier feature films, communication is a primary theme and the acts of listening and hearing are highlighted throughout *Bamako*. The to-and-fro movements through the courtyard door are matched by the sounds and the silences of evidence being given in the courtyard, simultaneously heard through the makeshift loudspeaker outside. The film

cuts between these levels of sound, so that the cinematic audience is positioned on both the inside and the outside, just as the locals are. This focus on listening reaches its zenith in a key sequence that powerfully epitomizes the critical cinema that Sissako achieves, in which colour plays a central role in representing the detrimental effects of globalization on the 'global south'. This occurs when a young man, Madou Keita, delivers his testimony at the bar, relating his attempt to leave the country and gain entry to Spain. Keita describes to the court how a group of about thirty people were left in the Sahara desert after being shot at by 'the Algerians'. In the desert a woman became exhausted and was unable to continue; the group could do nothing to help her. As he begins to speak the courtyard becomes completely still. We see a woman in mid-shot outside the courtyard, gazing over the draped cloths, unmoving as she listens to the testimony coming through the loudspeaker. We also see a young man inside the courtyard, silently looking at the camera through two brightly decorated hanging cloths as Keita speaks. In a further shot we see the same young man between one of these cloths and a different one. The implication is that Keita's story is so compelling that the young man can hardly move about his daily business and has to stop, watch and listen. In this way Sissako shows how the trial penetrates the consciousness of the courtyard's regular inhabitants.

Keita's testimony is suspended and more than a full minute passes before it continues, during which there is an astounding, poignant interlude about migration reminiscent of 1920s and 1930s Soviet montage, in which apparently unrelated shots are juxtaposed to create an affective response in the spectator.⁵ The image cuts to a closeup of the red water, stained from the cloth-dyeing process, draining away. We hear only the ambient sound of the swirling water. Here icon and historical reality merge: the cloth is literally the fabric of this local community's life; symbolically it is Africa's life-blood draining away. The placement of this shot and its emphasis on the blood-red dye and its thematic meaning can be seen as illustrating the connection made by Eisenstein between colour and 'imagery structure', particularly with regard to a 'work's theme and idea'.⁶ This holds for the continuing montage where, in the next shot, the ochre-stained cloth hangs full-screen, still moist from the dye, moving very slightly in the breeze, performing a further symbolic statement about the fragility of this local community's inner core and, by extension, of Africa's future. The threads of Africa's fabric, represented by this beautiful image, are clearly too fragile for the dominant global economic order. The silence over this montage sequence makes it all the more evocative.

There follows a brief cut back to the trial and a closeup of a woman in the audience dissolving into tears, her patterned black-and-white clothing etching her out against the general audience. Sissako encourages identification with the pain of this testimony by bringing in the plaintive opening strains of the song *Saa Magni* (Death is Terrible), by the well-known Malian singer Oumou Sangaré. We return briefly to a medium shot

5 Sissako studied filmmaking in the Soviet Union in the 1980s.

6 Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense* (1942), trans. Jay Leyda (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 122.

7 Tim Ingold, *Lines: a Brief History* (Oxford and New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), p. 103.

8 Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Super-modernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 1995).

of Madou Keita, speechless, vacantly staring, seemingly into the abyss of his painful memories. The continuing montage sequence illustrates his testimony as the music develops. A top-shot of the dying woman lying on the desert sand follows. The camera lingers on her limp body, fully exploiting audience engagement. The dark browns, oranges and sepias she wears etch her out against the pale sand. There is a cut to an image of dark-coloured scavenger beetles in the desert sand, the myriad lines they have created as they wander across the sand just visible. These faint, transient, haphazard scratchings act as a metaphor for the hopeless wanderings of migrants in the desert. By contrast the strength and clarity of the lines crisscrossing the inner and outer courtyards, vividly coloured by the cloths and clothes hung on them and highlighted by top-shots, connect the inner courtyard with the world beyond.

This thematic and visual concern with migratory lines, connections and separations, life lines and death lines, exemplifies Tim Ingold's definition of environment as 'a zone of entanglement – [a] meshwork of interwoven lines – [where] there are no insides or outsides, only openings or ways through'.⁷ The colourful courtyard lines, hung with the emblematic orange items of clothing and stained pieces of cloth, create this imagined connectivity, against which the harsh, empty, bleached-out desert becomes a liminal space, what Marc Augé calls a 'non-place'.⁸ This is exemplified by the still shot of the sand-filled (and coloured) desert that the migrants traverse, each of them singled out by a small trace of blue or orange against the pale sand. The image returns to the woman dying on the sand. In this closeup shot we witness her death, as her eyelids drop over her glazed eyes, she stops breathing and her body slumps. The next few shots cut between the group walking through the desert and the ochre-orange cloth hanging from the line, dripping blood-coloured water. Once the migrants have passed through the desert, the wide shot of the desert is held, with only the music playing over it – a pale counterpoint to the ochre cloth. This juxtaposition is a reminder of the broken connections created by global economic policies. This is reemphasized when, over the last empty shot of the desert sand that fills the screen, Madou Keita's testimony ends: 'only ten or so survived without much trouble. We don't know where the others are. Are they dead? Are they wandering in the Sahara? I don't know.' With the cut back to Keita in the witness stand, we notice that his shirt is the same pale colour as the bleached-out desert shots.

Other important aspects of the film's colour aesthetics in relationship to its themes are apparent in the mock spaghetti Western and the video image sequences incorporated into the film. The Western, entitled *Death in Timbuktu*, is screened communally on a television set brought out after dark when the court's proceedings have been adjourned. Its cowboy 'stars' include Danny Glover, also one of the film's producers, as well as Sissako himself, credited as Dramane Bassaro, the character he plays in his earlier film *La Vie sur terre*. Filmed on location in Timbuktu, with its natural-coloured walls and paths that the cowboys mirror in the shades of

brown they wear, this passage repeats the natural colouration of the desert images, and acts as an allegory for the bigger story that Sissako tells. The grainy, hazy video imagery seen through the camera lens of the videographer Falai (Habibou Demele) drains colour from the images. We watch video footage of the wedding party, where the irony of the bride's white, western-style wedding dress and facial makeup is in stark contrast to the court's proceedings. The closing images of *Bamako* are from Falai's video footage of Chaka's funeral, the shiny patterned blue cloth stretched over his body counterposed against the pale blue of a man ill with AIDS. The film closes on the sandy image of the courtyard walls and floor, with the brown door left open as Falai's camera follows the funeral procession leaving the courtyard.

Sissako leaves the spectator with a quotation from Aimé Césaire: 'My ear to the ground, I heard tomorrow pass by'.⁹ This invocation situates the film in a postcolonial critique that summarizes its visualization of the destruction wreaked by globalization. By incorporating a trial of globalization itself into the heart of an African courtyard, draped in brightly coloured cloth that both clothes and frames its inhabitants, Sissako portrays a local community that develops and expresses its own consciousness of the effects of globalization. Through the beauty of the colour aesthetics, the film's spectators are positioned to consider the proposal that a new global order can only occur through committed watching and listening, allowing the development of a common humanity that engages collective responsibility for globalization and its effects.

With thanks to David Murphy and Emma Sandon.

⁹ A translation of the last lines of Aimé Césaire's poem 'Les Pur-sang' (The Thoroughbreds). The earliest version was published in the first issue of the cultural journal *Tropiques* in April 1941.

The 'look' and how to keep it: cinematography, postproduction and digital colour

RICHARD MISEK

¹ Jacques Aumont, 'La trace et sa couleur', *Cinéma-thèque*, no. 2 (1992), pp. 6-24.

² The first feature film to go entirely through a digital postproduction workflow was the Coen Brothers' *O Brother Where Art Thou* (2001). Over subsequent years, DI became an increasingly popular postproduction route. By April 2003 almost thirty films had gone entirely through DI. See Debra Kaufman, 'A flexible finish', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 84, no. 4 (2003), pp. 80-89. DI is now the industry norm.

³ 'The legacy lives on', <http://www.theasc.com/society/index.php?pagename=About_the_ASC> [accessed 15 February 2010].

⁴ In Britain and most other anglophone countries the abbreviation for Director of Photography is DoP; in the USA it is DP.

Jacques Aumont has noted that, throughout screen history, filmmakers have tended to regard colour as something to be controlled.¹ Between the rise of Technicolor in the mid 1930s and the emergence of digital cinema in the late 1990s, this typically involved controlling the colours that appeared in front of a film camera through techniques including production design, costume design, lens filtration and coloured lighting. Since the spread of Digital Intermediate (DI) in the early to mid 2000s, screen colour has owed at least as much to computer-based postproduction processes as it has to camera-based production processes.² In this essay I explore colour as the focal point of a renegotiation of the historical roles of what are anachronistically still called the 'production' and 'postproduction' sectors of the film industry. I do so by means of a case study of the recent activities of the American Society of Cinematographers (ASC). Though the Society's membership numbers barely three hundred, it has for many decades been a prominent advocate of the 'art of cinematography' and of the interests of the cinematography profession as a whole.³ Using articles from its widely read trade journal, *American Cinematographer*, I explore some of the strategies used by the ASC over the last decade to preserve the privileged creative status of the Director of Photography (DoP) in the context of rapid technological and industrial change.⁴ These strategies have typically focused on colour. By exploring the various interactions between the ASC and the postproduction sector reported in *American Cinematographer*, as well as the rhetoric used to

report them, I address the following question: if colour is something to be controlled, who controls it?

The ASC's view of film production can be summarized as follows: a film's director has a mental image (a 'vision') of how the script will appear on screen; the DoP realizes this 'vision' by registering moving images with a 'look' that corresponds to, or improves on, what the director imagined; by setting the 'look' of images registered by the camera, the cinematographer is thus by implication responsible for the overall 'look' of a film; colour constitutes a key aspect of a film's 'look', and so falls within the cinematographer's creative territory. This view of film production, and thus the cinematographer's status as a key creative, has historically owed much to the limitations of photochemical postproduction technology. Not much can be done to alter the appearance of a film print in a laboratory. The limited options available are mainly related to 'colour timing', otherwise known as 'primary colour grading'. Colour timing involves adjusting the relative amount of each primary colour that an interpositive is exposed to, thereby altering the relative amount of red, green and blue in a film's internegative and exhibition prints. Too much primary colour, however, cannot be removed, because reducing the amount of red, green or blue light passing through a print also results in a darker image. Thus the 'look' of a photochemical film is indeed primarily dependent on choices made when filming.

A film's 'look' is now no longer set during production. Primary colour grading is now carried out digitally, and as a result can be used to adjust colour balance without the restrictions inherent in photochemical colour timing. Red, green and blue can be adjusted in any combination without causing reduced exposure. Conversely, exposure can be changed without affecting colour balance; and this is only the beginning of what can now be done with colour. Writing in the early 1990s, William Mitchell noted that the essential characteristic of digital information is the fact that it 'can be manipulated easily' because it is simply 'a matter of substituting new digits for old'.⁵ 'Secondary colour grading', first used in television commercials in the mid 1990s, has translated the promise of 'easy manipulation' into practice. Primary grading alters the colour balance of an entire shot; secondary grading allows specific colour values and areas of the frame to be altered in isolation. A blue sky, for example, can be made pink without changing the hue of the sea.⁶ Any range of colour values in any area of the screen can be transformed into any other range of colour values, without having an effect on the rest of the image. Digital colour grading makes possible such extreme chromatic alterations that it is not enough to say that a film's colour can now be *adjusted* in postproduction; rather, a film's colour can now be *created* in postproduction. For example, the colours of Zack Snyder's *300* (2006) bear virtually no resemblance to those registered on set. Snyder gave the film its comic-book aesthetic of clipped highlights, crushed shadows and desaturated colour through primary grading, and settled on yellow as the film's chromatic major through secondary grading (see figure 5).⁷

5 William J. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

6 For a more detailed history of digital colour, see Richard Misek, *Chromatic Cinema: a History of Screen Colour* (Malvern, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

7 David E. Williams, 'Few against many', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 88, no. 4 (2007), pp. 52-65.

8 Stephanie Argy, 'Post focus: the colorist's perspective', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 86, no. 7 (2005), pp. 82-88. Film scanning involves encoding sections of a film as high-resolution files for visual effects work. Telecine involves transferring film negatives or prints to video for television broadcast.

9 Ironically, cinematographers have more recently also become anxious about technological developments in preproduction – notably the spread of digital 'previsualization'. See Stephanie Argy and Richard Edlund, 'Assessing previz', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 90, no. 6 (2009), pp. 70-77.

10 Debra Kaufman and Ray Zone, 'A legacy of invention: cinematographers exploring the growing possibilities of postproduction are continuing in a time-honored tradition', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 83, no. 5 (2002), pp. 64-77.

11 Christopher Probst, 'Picture perfect', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 79, no. 4 (1997), pp. 30-34.

12 Ibid.

Accompanying the shift in chromatic decision-making towards postproduction has been the emergence of a new creative role: the 'colourist'. As the degree to which colour could be adjusted in postproduction increased during the 1990s, many colour timers, film scanners and telecine operators upgraded their skills and moved into colour grading suites to become colourists.⁸ Colourists now have a significant effect on the final 'look' of almost all film and television production, and have accordingly become highly valued. They are among the highest-paid workers in the postproduction sector. They are even, as the news pages of industry journals including *Broadcast* regularly demonstrate, routinely headhunted by post houses seeking to attract high-budget projects.

Unsurprisingly, the changes signalled by the rise of the colourist have provoked anxiety among cinematographers, albeit sometimes mixed with technophilic excitement.⁹ Accordingly, since the spread of digital colour grading to cinema in the early 2000s, the ASC has attempted several distinct strategies to keep control of colour. Its initial strategy involved campaigning for cinematographers to become involved in postproduction. Articles in *American Cinematographer* drew attention to, and furthered, this agenda. For example, a 2002 article entitled 'A legacy of invention: cinematographers exploring the growing possibilities of postproduction are continuing in a time-honored tradition' emphasizes the historical connections between cinematography and postproduction.¹⁰ The article comprises examples of cinematographers' involvement in postproduction and the perceived creative triumphs that resulted. It presents these examples chronologically, from Billy Bitzer's background as a projectionist to Andrew Lesnie's involvement in the digital 'look development' of Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003). The article thus provides cinematographers with a ready-made argument for persuading producers of the value of paying them to spend time working on a film after the principal photography has finished. From the evidence of this and similar articles dating from the early 2000s, it appears that the ASC felt that attracting cinematographers into colour grading suites would be a hard sell.¹¹ However, given the expertise of a typical feature film's DoP, and the fact that most colourists were recently promoted technicians, the ASC was actually pushing at an open door. By the mid 2000s cinematographers were routinely carrying out much of their work at post houses. Snyder's DoP on *300*, Larry Fong, continued to work on the film throughout postproduction.¹²

Although the cinematography profession's anxiety about being excluded from postproduction proved unfounded, its anxiety about losing control of screen colour did not. Securing access to grading suites did not ensure control of colour. Regardless of what happens during grading, the colour values of pixels change of their own accord at each stage in the postproduction process, as digital video files are copied, transcoded and compressed. David Rodowick elaborates William Mitchell's discussion of image manipulation by suggesting that the most significant effect of

13 D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007)

14 Suggested solutions most often took the form of software-based 'Look-Up Tables' (LUTs). See Elina Shatkin, 'Post focus: creative bridge puts digital lab in motion', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 87, no. 6 (2006), pp. 100-104.

15 Douglas Bankston, 'The color-space conundrum, part 1', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 86, no. 1 (2005), pp. 88-110.

16 Douglas Bankston, 'The color-space conundrum, part 2', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 86, no. 4 (2005), pp. 76-107.

17 Ibid.

18 Douglas Bankston, 'Tomorrow's technology', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 88, no. 12 (2007), pp. 110-12.

19 Iain Stasukevich, 'Post focus: achieving color symmetry', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 89, no. 1 (2008), pp. 100-104.

digital technology on screen media is that any aspect of an image can change at any point in the production process, so outputs are no longer related to inputs.¹³ For the last decade and a half, the cinematography profession has been struggling to retain a relation between the two. Between the mid 1990s and the mid 2000s, as well as campaigning for ASC members' access to postproduction, *American Cinematographer* routinely reported on cinematographers' ideas about how the 'problem' of colour management could be solved by technological means.¹⁴ In 2002 the ASC went a step further. It set up a 'Technology Committee', and began to engage directly with colour management technology. *American Cinematographer* announced the committee's establishment as follows:

Look-Up Tables, cameras, algorithms for color sampling, compression and conversion, etc. – are being developed at a breakneck pace. With manufacturers pursuing their own directions and goals, this has led to a digital realm without order, beyond the controlled borders of a select group of post facilities who have been engineering their own proprietary workflow solutions. Taking on the difficult role of sheriff in this lawless land is the ASC Technology Committee.¹⁵

As in many Westerns, the sheriff was self appointed. Within two years the Technology Committee had developed plans for a multimillion-dollar research centre next to its clubhouse, devoted to refining postproduction workflows.¹⁶ Companies involved in postproduction research and development would be invited to use the ASC's state-of-the-art facilities to test their workflows. Curtis Clark, chairman of the Technology Committee, summarized the purpose of the prospective research centre as follows:

Our work will reinforce the value proposition for the cinematographer's role in managing the look within the new hybrid imaging workflow. As a consequence, we will generate greater awareness and respect for what cinematographers do and cement the importance of the ASC's leadership role.¹⁷

The sheriff may have overestimated his ability to lay down the law. Progress reports continued to appear in *American Cinematographer* for just over a year, and then stopped. Perhaps the ASC realized that by building a research centre it risked overextending its territorial reach, and that the various parties involved in developing postproduction technology would be unlikely to accept a cinematography union's leadership. Whatever the reasons for the project's demise, the ASC instead spent its spare millions on refurbishing its clubhouse.

The society has nonetheless continued to develop plans to keep control of colour throughout postproduction. In 2007 the Technology Committee announced that it was developing a 'colour decision list' (CDL).¹⁸ This lists the metadata attached to video files, detailing the original colour and exposure properties of each shot.¹⁹ In principle, the metadata allows operators using any postproduction platform to adjust the colour values of

20 Ibid.

21 The article is Richard P. Crudo, 'A call for digital printer lights', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 87, no. 9 (2006), pp. 70-77; Technicolor's response is detailed in Iain Stasukevich, 'Post focus: DP dailies system targets image control', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 90, no. 7 (2009), pp. 60-62.

22 See, for example, DoP Oliver Wood's discussion of how he attempted to 'build a look' for Paul Greengrass's *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007). Jon Silberg, 'Bourne again', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 88, no. 9 (2007), pp. 32-43.

23 Pines also sits on the ASC's Technology Committee. Benjamin B., 'An overview of the ASC CDL', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 89, no. 10 (2008), pp. 74-76.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

video files so that they will look exactly the same as they looked on the cinematographer's monitor.²⁰ In contrast to its plans for a research centre, the Technology Committee's less overtly territorial plan to establish an industry-wide CDL has met with some success. For example, apparently in response to an article in *American Cinematographer*, Technicolor (which now operates as a postproduction company) has begun to trial the CDL, and is exploring ways of integrating it into postproduction workflows.²¹

The involvement of Technicolor in research and development of the CDL demonstrates that, despite the cinematography profession's ongoing anxiety about 'the look' and how to keep it, its relationship with the postproduction sector is symbiotic. Cinematographers and postproduction professionals collaborate on a daily basis: to keep any degree of control over a film's 'look', a cinematographer needs to cultivate close working relationships with colourists and postproduction supervisors.²²

Postproduction houses, in turn, depend on close relationships with cinematographers, not least because DoPs can often have a major influence on producers' choices about which postproduction companies they use. Perhaps this is why Joshua Pines, vice-president of Imaging Research at Technicolor Digital Intermediates, praises the CDL as 'a way of giving creative control back to the cinematographer'.²³ Pines even reiterates the ASC's mantra: 'Just like the director has first cut, the cinematographer should have first look'.²⁴ Indeed, rather than interpreting the CDL as another attempt by the ASC to regulate postproduction, one might interpret it instead as evidence of how far understanding between the two industry sectors has developed. The most telling feature of the CDL is what it does not include. Its metadata only provide information usable for primary colour correction – notably RGB values, saturation, contrast and brightness. It provides no instructions for secondary colour correction.²⁵ The CDL cannot, for example, tell a colourist how to apply chromatic changes to individual areas of the screen or to isolated colours.

The CDL's focus on primary colour grading is quite understandable. Cinematographers have historically always involved themselves in colour timing, and the ASC's goal of keeping control of a film's overall 'look' necessitates its members' continued control of primary colour grading. However, it is telling that the Technology Committee is not even bothering to assert control over secondary colour grading. Perhaps it accepts that the ASC cannot really make a persuasive historical argument for why a DoP should have creative control over secondary grading, as it has no photochemical precursor. If this is the case, then perhaps an implicit agreement about how cinematographers and colourists divide responsibility for realizing a director's 'vision' has at last been achieved. Cinematographers control the overall colour scheme of a film; colourists have control over more precise shot-by-shot colour effects.

The above equilibrium suggests that, in a sense, the ASC has won its recent battle. The DoP's influence over the 'look' of feature films has survived the rise of the colourist. However, the ASC's choice to restrict its

territorial claim to primary colour grading hints that the cinematographer's status as a key creative may now be restricted to forms of screen media in which 'filming' is still a major element. Prominent among these is narrative cinema, which still typically involves physical locations, actors performing in front of a camera, and so on. In feature film production, as *American Cinematographer's* continued focus on high-budget studio films demonstrates, the DoP's role as a key creative remains intact. The ASC's members can breathe a collective sigh of relief – their jobs are safe. Beyond feature films, however, the outlook for cinematographers is quite different. Contemporary screen media are now typically the result of numerous processes, only one of which involves actual filming. In television commercials, pop promos, web advertising and many other forms of moving image, motion graphics typically play at least as important a role as cinematography. Stephen Prince goes so far as to suggest that, in the context of contemporary media hybridity, cinematography is simply an 'image capture' process, like scanning a photo.²⁶ Indeed, in many examples of contemporary moving image (for example, video billboards in public spaces), cinematography often plays no role whatsoever. Inasmuch as the ASC has succeeded in reasserting its members' creative influence over feature films, it has won its territorial conflict with the postproduction sector. By restricting its fight to feature films, however, it may have lost the subsequent peace.

²⁶ Stephen Prince, 'The emergence of filmic artifacts: cinema and cinematography in the digital era', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 3 (2004), pp. 24-33.

Mourning television: the other screen

JOHN CAUGHIE

This essay was originally presented as a closing plenary paper at the 2009 *Screen* conference, a conference that both celebrated the journal's fiftieth anniversary and invited critical reflection on 'Screen Theorizing Today'. In that context, the paper reflected on *Screen*'s engagement with television since the late 1950s and was conceived, in some sense, as a companion piece to Annette Kuhn's 'Screen and screen theorizing today', which introduced the conference and the anniversary issue of *Screen*.¹ In a broader context, in which the slippage between 'screen theory' and 'Screen theory' often seems to mask an assumption of cinema as the defining primal scene, the paper was intended to offer a brief and selective history of *Screen*'s engagement with that insistent other screen which has always threatened – or promised – to destabilize any classicist tendencies of *Screen* theory, opening it to the wider complexities of a theory of the screen and the different public and private spaces which screens now occupy. Perhaps inappropriately in the context of a celebration, the argument begins and ends with mourning.

In her 2004 *Screen* essay in which she explores the 'dichotomous relation between drama and reality television',² Helen Piper begins by pointing out a historical paradox. 'It is ironic', she says,

that at the same time as John Caughie should be penning an elegy for a 'serious' drama practice that mattered to public culture, the clamour against new genres should begin in earnest, precisely because they seem to matter quite as much as they do.³

Her reference is to my 2000 book on British television drama, in which I acknowledge 'the elegiac tones of a narrative of loss' that keep creeping

1 Annette Kuhn, 'Screen and screen theorizing today', *Screen*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2009), pp. 1-13.

2 Helen Piper, 'Reality TV, *Wife Swap* and the drama of banality', *Screen*, vol. 45, no. 4 (2004), pp. 273-86.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 273.

- 4 John Caughie, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 203.

into my account of television drama:⁴ an account which may seem to slip into an elegy for a form of television drama in which something seemed to be at stake both politically and culturally. Piper contrasts this with a public clamour in 2003 against reality shows that seemed to cater for 'increasingly debased pleasures'. This 'clamour' was, of course, orchestrated by the usual commentators who claim to speak for public opinion, and culminated in the call by Tessa Jowell, then Minister of Culture, for a 'viewer revolt'. This was a different form of engagement than the one I had elegized, but no less political; and, as Piper argues, it was certainly one in which something seemed to matter to someone.

I am less concerned here with any argument between Piper and myself – and I am not sure there is one – than with the phrase she uses: 'penning an elegy'. The ironic archaism of 'penning an elegy' evokes the age of Milton, in *Lycidas*, penning his elegy for the death of his young friend; or of Gray penning his in a country churchyard. Elegy as genteel grief, the sublimation of sorrow. The barbed irony of the phrase catches me out, and makes me aware of the dangerous looseness of those elegiac tones which keep creeping in.

So this is the immediate and personal provocation for this intervention. I am also, however, increasingly struck by how many conversations among those of us who are committed to theorizing and teaching television are now inflected by some sense of loss: whether it be the loss of a 'seriousness' in which television actually matters; of a 'popularity' which is not simply obedient to the market; the fading of the possibilities of a different television which seemed to open in the UK with Channel 4; or the waning of an object of study which has simply been overwhelmed by too many texts – too many texts for the discipline of television studies to discipline; too many texts and too many carriers of texts. On the one hand, in academic teaching many of us seem to be feeling the loss of the object of study: television has become unruly, almost unteachable. On the other hand, perhaps it is precisely this recalcitrance, this disorderliness, that draws us to television studies and makes it worth keeping faith with its indiscipline.

What is clear to me, though, is that the tones of an elegy that slips easily into nostalgia – the desire to return to an imaginary home – have no purchase on this. What I want to do here, in response to Piper's salutary provocation, is to align elegy with mourning precisely in order to distance it from nostalgia.

In her book, *The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film*, Alessia Ricciardi reminds us that Freud in 'Mourning and melancholia' identifies mourning as a work – the 'work of mourning' or the *Trauerarbeit*⁵ – and she deploys the term to understand the 'working through' of loss and memory in her three exemplary texts: Proust's *In Search of Lost Times* (1913-27), Pasolini's *Teorema* (1968) and Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-98).⁶ In her chapter on *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, Godard's act of mourning the death of cinema is revealed as precisely that working through of history and story, histories and stories. She recalls that, as early as 1965, Pasolini had already said of Godard's early films

5 Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and melancholia', in *On Metapsychology: the Theory of Psychoanalysis*, Pelican Freud Library, Volume XI, ed. Angela Richards, trans. James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp. 245-68.

6 Alessia Ricciardi, *The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

7 Ibid., p. 184.

8 Ibid., p. 2.

9 Ibid., p. 8.

10 Ibid.

11 John Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (London: IB Tauris, 2002). See, particularly, Chapter 6, 'Working through: television in the age of uncertainty'.

12 Regrettably, I have not yet read the material on television in *Screen Education Notes* and *Screen Education* between 1972 and 1982, although that would be a necessary part of a larger project.

13 Such an exhaustive chronological reading is made easier by the appearance of the online archive of *Screen*, <<http://screen.oxfordjournals.org/archive/>> [accessed 26 July 2010].

that 'The elegy is inconceivable to him ...', and she concludes: 'In *Histoire(s)* the elegiac mode is finally offset by the traumatic, resulting in a meditation on the nature and possibilities of cinema, rather than a melancholic celebration of its former glories'.⁷

Ricciardi holds Lacan responsible for abandoning the Freudian notion of mourning as the working through of a historically specific event, replacing it with an attitude of ironic detachment towards the past. This move, she claims, paves the way, and provides the theoretical underpinning, for what she calls the 'jaded, knowing spirit of what is now defined as postmodern culture'. Detachment has been aggravated, she argues, by the 'ascendancy of populist commodity culture' in which

the fundamental projects of ethical and political emancipation have been discarded altogether, like so many theoretical frivolities to be pragmatically overcome. As a result, the abandonment of a hermeneutics of mourning both compromises our understanding of the past and sterilizes our vision of the future, as it deprives our culture not only of utopian inspirations and messianic inclinations, but also, finally, of the very notion of justice.⁸

Her conclusion is that 'A genuinely critical discussion of mourning in contemporary culture ought to avoid a nostalgic view of culture'.⁹

There is much of Ricciardi's argument with which I have difficulty, and her 'working through', like Godard's, is intended as an antidote to commodified, capitalist culture rather than offering a way of 'working through' television within that culture. Yet in thinking about television, it is difficult not to recognize the 'diffuse aesthetic landscape' she evokes: a landscape, like Godard's *paysage audiovisuel*, in which 'art and technology increasingly conspire to reflect the relentless spectacle of the present'.¹⁰

The notion of 'working through' is already familiar in television studies from John Ellis's *Seeing Things*.¹¹ Where Ellis turns Freud's term towards the operations of television itself, however, I want to inflect it towards criticism and theory. The waning of a particular public space for television is, of course, crucial to the concept of mourning and I will return to this, but I want to begin with a mourning which is directed not at the lost object of television itself but at forms of engagement: 'mourning' as a way of 'working through' a specific history of engagement, and, therefore, as another attempt to reflect on *Screen* theorizing and thinking about screen theorizing today.

The specific history is the history of *Screen*'s engagement with television, and my working through has an almost ludic form. The self-imposed rules of the game required me to read, in chronological order, all the essays on television which appeared in *Screen Education* between 1959 and 1968, and in *Screen* between 1969 and 2009: fifty years of *Screen* on television.¹² Fortunately it is not necessary for my argument here to reproduce my chronological reading issue by issue and essay by essay.¹³ Even Freud admitted that the 'working through' part of the

14 Sigmund Freud, 'Remembering, repeating and working-through', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, Volume XII, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1958), p. 155.

analytic process was a 'trial of patience for the analyst'.¹⁴ For present purposes, I simply want to identify some points of resistance or moments of cathexis. I begin with the numerical distribution of articles and their countries and regions of origin.

Screen articles on television, 1969-2009, with country/region of origin

Country of origin	Number of articles
UK	180
USA	34
Continental Europe	5
Australia	4
Canada	3
South Africa	2
Brazil	1
India	1
Israel	1
TOTAL	231

I have restricted the period to the forty years between 1969 and 2009 because from 1959 to 1969 *Screen Education* was primarily a teachers' journal aimed at a purely national audience, and virtually all of its articles originated in the UK. I have also restricted the figures to articles, so reviews or short reports are not included.¹⁵ The figures for those forty years, however, for most of which *Screen* would have claimed to be an international journal, remind us how national television studies is. The first non-UK articles on television did not appear until the 'TV issue' in 1981, which included a translation from the Brazilian journal *Contracampo* of a short article by Jesus R. Requeña on narrativity in US television films, and Patricia Zimmerman's article on US independents and the television networks.¹⁶ This was followed, in a special issue on melodrama, in 1984 by Jane Feuer's influential essay on melodrama and serial form,¹⁷ and, later the same year, by an article by Douglas Gomery on the US television industry in another television special issue.¹⁸ (It is of at least academic interest that the number of US articles in *Screen* on television, and more generally on both cinema and television, increases after 1990 when *Screen* finally admits to being an academic journal with proper peer reviewing processes.) The one Indian article and two of the European articles were in a special issue on television studies in education. The uneven national and international distribution of articles at a time when *Screen* had established itself at the leading edge of international film theory confirms again that we can never speak of the institution of television in quite the same way as we speak of cinema.

The history of *Screen*, its origins in *The Film Teacher* and *Screen Education*, and its affiliations with the Society of Film Teachers, the Society for Education in Film and Television (SEFT) and the British Film Institute, its major funder until 1989, is recounted in Terry Bolas's recent book *Screen Education*.¹⁹ It is, of course, a contested history, encrusted

15 The comparable figure for articles on film and/or cinema would be approximately eight hundred.

16 Jesus R. Requeña, 'Narrativity/discursivity in the American television film', trans. Susan Honeyford, *Screen*, vol. 22, no. 4 (1981), pp. 38-42; Patricia R. Zimmerman, 'Independent documentary producers and the American television networks', *Screen*, vol. 22, no. 4 (1981), pp. 43-52.

17 Jane Feuer, 'Melodrama, serial form and television today', *Screen*, vol. 25, no. 1 (1984), pp. 4-17.

18 Douglas Gomery, 'Economic change in the US television industry', *Screen*, vol. 25, no. 2 (1984), pp. 62-67.

19 Terry Bolas, *Screen Education: From Film Appreciation to Media Studies* (Bristol: Intellect, 2009). Reviewed in this issue, p. 422.

20 Kuhn, 'Screen and screen theorizing today'.

21 Sam Rohdie, 'Education and criticism', *Screen*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1971), pp. 9-14; Jean-Luc Comolli and Paul [sic; his actual name is Jean] Narboni, 'Cinema/ideology/criticism', trans. Susan Bennett, *Screen*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1971), pp. 27-39; Ben Brewster, 'Structuralism in film criticism' [review of Macksey and Donato (eds), *The Structuralist Controversy: the Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970)], *Screen*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1971), pp. 49-58. This issue is discussed more fully in Kuhn's article.

22 Paddy Whannel, 'Film education and film culture', *Screen*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1969), p. 49. In 1964, Whannel had coauthored with Stuart Hall one of the founding texts of the study of popular culture, *The Popular Arts* (London: Hutchinson Educational, 1964).

with memories of conflict and dispute as much as of debate, and Bolas's inclusion of photographs of the pubs and restaurants in the Soho streets near the former *Screen* office remind us that intellectual history is never just about the intellect. Annette Kuhn's introduction to the anniversary issue of *Screen*, however, condenses and negotiates some of the key critical movements and trajectories in that intellectual history.²⁰ As she suggests, the early history of *Screen Education* and *Screen* comes to an end in 1971, with volume 12, number 1, when *Screen* is reformatted, and something recognizable today as a *Screen* project begins to be defined in Sam Rohdie's essay 'Education and criticism', in the translation from *Cahiers du cinéma* of Comolli/Narboni's 'Cinema/ideology/criticism', or in Ben Brewster's review of a series of books on structuralism.²¹

For present purposes, however, and to begin the history of writing about television, it is worth returning to that earlier pre-Rohdie history, to what was in some ways the period of infancy before volume 12, a period before the 'mirror phase', when identity was still uncertain and the subject was not yet formed in the Imaginary.

One of the most striking characteristics of the period between 1959 and 1970 is a problem in naming the object of study. Even as late as 1969, in an essay in *Screen* on 'Film education and film culture', someone as central to the development of film studies and to the study of popular culture in Britain as Paddy Whannel (1922-80), then Education Officer at the British Film Institute, lamented the difficulty which faced the promoters of film study courses when there was no clear understanding of 'what the subject is' and no agreement about the name of the thing they promoted.

The fact that there is no agreed term to describe the subject, no equivalent of the term 'literature', for example, is the most obvious indication of the difficulty. All of us shift uneasily between such descriptions as Film Education, with the danger of confusing the subject with audio-visual aids, and the clumsy Screen Education, implying the uncertain and dubious inclusion of television. At times, for the sake of clarity, we are driven to return to the old fashioned term, Film Appreciation, with all its limiting connotations.²²

Whannel's unease about the inclusion of television is clear, and for the purposes of clarity – and in order to exclude television – he is driven back to the 'old-fashioned' term 'Film Appreciation', the name given to the BFI unit to which he had been appointed in 1957. The limiting connotations of the term were precisely that it betrayed the origins of film studies – and television studies, and the study of popular culture – in the education of those pupils who were deemed to be incapable of appreciating anything better: pupils who would never proceed to higher education, many of whom followed what was then called a 'modified curriculum', taught in classes which were rather quaintly referred to – when I taught briefly in a secondary school – as 'modified boys' and 'modified girls'. (The fact that the classes always seemed to be segregated

along gender lines hinted that there might be something rather sinister behind the modification.)

The first issue of *Screen Education* was published by the newly named Society for Education in Film and Television in 1959 – cost one shilling. The second issue was a Special Television Number. This included an article, ‘Towards a critique of television’, by R. G. Holloway, a Senior Lecturer in English at City of Leeds Training College, describing a series of lessons on television designed for fifteen-year-old boys at a secondary modern school: boys ‘whose general ability was regarded by the headmaster as below average. They came from back to back houses, but all except one had TV at home and the single exception frequently saw television at a relative’s house.’²³ The lesson consisted of asking the students about their experience of viewing television on the previous evening (this was television studies before television could be replayed in the classroom) and then comparing their banal experience of television to the experience of reading *Macbeth*. The pupils’ ‘boredom’ with routine television was used to point out that

these programmes ultimately disappoint because they fail to make life more interesting. Act 2 Scene 2 of *Macbeth* was read and the class soon realised the interest in persons, in the contrast between Macbeth’s fear and his wife’s callous strength. It was explained that although the incidents in the play were unusual the human situation and the emotions involved were those of real life. This difficult point was taken and the class were extraordinarily attentive to the reading, although they would not have understood much of it. ... All that can be claimed for this scheme is that it introduced a variety of activities which held the interest and attention of boys not accustomed to thinking about questions of value.²⁴

I am working through this early history not simply to demonstrate our superiority to those distant times, but to recover something in the terms of ‘Film or Television Appreciation’ which has not survived the embarrassment of its ‘limiting connotations’. Certainly this particular way of teaching values has ever since made it very difficult for *Screen*, or television criticism more generally, to return to questions of value, as Charlotte Brunsdon has pointed out.²⁵ Nevertheless, it is important to identify here what was at stake in the idea of ‘appreciation’, which served as a point of origin for film and television studies. The founding principle which informed much early teaching and critical worrying about film and television was that one of the purposes of educating the citizenry of the future in the appreciation of these media was not just to ‘improve’ the students by exposing them to values, but was also to improve film and television by exposing *them* to an educated audience, endowed with the democratic capacity to demand more and better. This principle still informed, for many of us, the formation of film studies and film and television studies departments in UK higher education in the 1970s and 1980s. For many of us, unrealistic as it may now seem, the possibility of

²³ R. G. Holloway, ‘Towards a critique of television’, *Screen Education*, no. 2 (1960), p. 8. From 1944 to 1970, secondary modern schools were attended by pupils who had not scored sufficiently highly in the ‘11-plus’ exams to qualify for a selective secondary education. They were designed for the teaching of basic, practical skills to students judged incapable of following either an academic or an advanced technical curriculum.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.11.

²⁵ Charlotte Brunsdon, ‘Problems with quality’, *Screen*, vol. 31, no. 1 (1990), pp. 67–90.

changing institutions (of both media and education) through exposure to critical theory and analysis determined the urgent political need to engage with television and with the particular opportunities for critical intervention it presented. While Hollywood was unlikely to be shaken by the intervention of film theory, there always seemed to be a possibility that in television someone might just be listening. The point, to paraphrase Marx, was not only to interpret the world of television, but to change it.

This seems to me to be the aspirational, possibly utopian, impulse which runs through *Screen*'s history, and its attenuation is one of the things I want to mourn and work through as *Screen* becomes more comfortable with its status as an academic journal, broadening its horizons (and its subscription base) to become an international journal. Internationalization is always double-edged, and it is still possible to mourn the loss or diminution of earlier forms of local engagement with the world of practice and practitioners. Some of the forms of engagement between *Screen* and television have undoubtedly been very particular to the UK, to its institutions and its public culture, and thus might have seemed eccentric from a non-UK perspective. But it is precisely their local specificity which has been important in defining a particular mode of engagement in television studies, and has raised the level of theory's ambition to make a difference.

When in 1977 *Screen* published one of its definitive early articles on television, Stephen Heath and Gillian Skirrow's analysis of a *World in Action* documentary on truancy²⁶, both the issue editor and the authors sought to establish the essay's claims to be not simply a detailed, semiotic analysis of a single, 'routine' television programme but also an intervention in the professional world of programme-making, an exposure of the workings of the institution of television as a specific signifying practice. The editorial introduces it as inspired by the withdrawal of *Viewpoint* (Thames Television, 1975), a series of educational television programmes on which Skirrow had been a producer and which Thames considered to be too obviously politically motivated. The authors themselves seek to hold open the possibility that the 'stopping' of programmes in analysis, the exposure of the signifying practices of the institution, might be a form of political intervention in the practice of television documentary making.

it is only in the detailed consideration of particular instances that the effective reality of television production can be grasped (it should be noted, too, that there is an immediate intervention made, and a potentially decisive gain to be won, with those working in television, by the very fact of stopping programmes, exposing then in all the detail of their functioning).²⁷

It is worth observing in passing a difference of ambition and address – in who might be thought to be listening – between the analysis of the specific signifying practices of Hollywood in Stephen Heath's famous analysis of *Touch of Evil* (Orson Welles, 1958) in 1975²⁸ and Heath and Skirrow's

26 Stephen Heath and Gillian Skirrow, 'Television: a world in action', *Screen*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1977), pp. 7-59.

27 Ibid., p. 9.

28 Stephen Heath, 'Film and system: terms of analysis', parts 1 and 2, *Screen*, vol. 16, no 1 (1975), pp. 7-77, and vol. 16, no. 2 (1975), pp. 91-113.

methodologically similar analysis of television in *World in Action* only two years later. 'No doubt it is necessary to be pessimistic', the authors say:

Our contribution in this account has been towards the organisation of pessimism, trying to grasp it in analysis, to suggest briefly, sketchily, constant moments of problem, constant points from which work could begin. If nothing else, but then this was all our strategy in such an initial piece, merely to *expose* television in its programmes – stopped and laid out on the page – has a value against the sufficiency of the institution and its unquestioned performance of the subject.²⁹

To analyze television (unlike the analysis of 'classical cinema'), and to expose television in its programmes, could still be posed as an intervention in practice – 'the sufficiency of the institution' – as well as an intervention in theory – the 'performance of the subject'. Although it was expressed as the 'organisation of pessimism', there was still, despite all the 'real world' evidence, a highly optimistic sense that theory might change television: theory still bearing its 'utopian inspirations' and 'messianic inclinations'.

Similar engagements between practice and theory, between practitioners and theorists, and by practitioners *as* theorists can be found in debates on television documentary conducted in *Screen* between Nicholas Garnham and Dai Vaughan, starting in 1972. Garnham had recently left the BBC, where he had been an editor, director and producer of documentaries and current affairs for ten years, in order to become an academic. Dai Vaughan was a documentary editor who had written widely on television documentary, and who, somewhat to the surprise of Heath and Skirrow, turned out to have edited a section of the *World in Action* programme they had analyzed. His response to their analysis is both generous and sophisticated, as is theirs to him.³⁰

This engagement by *Screen* in which theoretical critique was not only intended to expose television in its programmes but to make it better, to make it other than it was – more open, more diverse, more independent, more radically experimental – was perhaps most apparent in the period leading up to and immediately following the launch of Channel 4 in 1982. Indeed, the decade between 1979 and 1989 is probably the period in which *Screen* most closely resembled a campaigning journal.

At one level, this was the period when the journal became the theoretical wing of the Independent Filmmakers' Association (IFA) in its campaign to promote the cause of real diversity on Channel 4, opening it in a meaningful way to voices which had not been heard before on British television. At another level, it was the period when *Screen* was most responsive to wider questions of broadcasting policy.³¹ And at yet another level, looking back through the lens of hindsight, it emerges as the period when any mourning for the loss of a particular form of critical engagement is bound up and confused with a sense of loss and mourning for a Channel 4 whose innovation, diversity and distinctiveness in the

²⁹ Heath and Skirrow, 'Television: a world in action', p. 58.

³⁰ See, for example, Nicholas Garnham, 'TV documentary and ideology', *Screen*, vol. 13, no. 2 (1972), pp. 109-15; Charles Parker, 'TV documentary and ideology – a reply to Nicholas Garnham', *Screen*, vol. 13, no. 4 (1972-73), pp. 152-4; Dai Vaughan, 'The space between shots', *Screen*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1974), pp. 73-86; Dai Vaughan, 'Heath and Skirrow on *World in Action*', *Screen*, vol. 18, no. 4 (1977), pp. 123-5; Gillian Skirrow and Stephen Heath, 'Response to Dai Vaughan', *Screen*, vol. 18, no. 4 (1977), pp. 126-8.

³¹ See, for example, John Wyver, 'The debate on TV4', *Screen*, vol. 20, nos 3/4 (1979/80), pp. 111-4; IFA, 'The Independent Film-makers' Association and the fourth channel', *Screen*, vol. 21, no. 4 (1980/81), pp. 56-79; Nicholas Garnham,

'Public service versus the market', *Screen*, vol. 24, no. 1 (1983), pp. 6-27; Jonathan Curling and Felicity Oppé, 'A declaration of independence', *Screen*, vol. 24, no. 1 (1983), pp. 53-61; Eight programme makers, 'Channel 4: one year on', *Screen*, vol. 25, no. 2 (1984) pp. 4-25; Sue Aspinall, 'The space for innovation and experiment', *Screen*, vol. 25, no. 6 (1984), pp. 73-87; John Ellis, 'Broadcasting and the State', *Screen*, vol. 27, nos 3/4 (1986), pp. 6-23; Kevin Robins and Frank Webster, 'Broadcasting politics: communications and consumption', *Screen*, vol. 27, nos 3/4 (1986), pp. 30-45; Sean Cubitt, 'Reply to Robins and Webster', *Screen*, vol. 27, nos 3/4 (1986), pp. 46-51; Ken Worpole, 'Licensed and unlicensed culture: state regulation and cultural forms', *Screen*, vol. 27, nos 3/4 (1986), pp. 52-65; Colin Sparks, 'The impact of technological and political change on the labour force in British broadcasting', *Screen*, vol. 30, no. 1 (1989), pp. 24-39; Sylvia Harvey, 'Deregulation, innovation and Channel 4', *Screen*, vol. 30, no. 1 (1989), pp. 60-79.

1980s we thought that engagement had informed, and, for a time, achieved: a Channel 4 which now appears to be just another channel, one more station in the monstrous accumulation of television, a channel of lost and, possibly, last hopes.

It is the implicit but informing principle that even in the apparently primitive forms of television or film 'appreciation', theory and criticism had some necessary connection with institutional and cultural change that seems to me to have become attenuated as the tectonic plates of practice and theory, filmmaking and academia, slid apart to form separate islands. If elegy still seems seductive and the organization of pessimism still seems to resonate, it is because an academic fascination with the phenomenon of television *as it is* and the description of its many forms *as they are* seems so often (but not always) to have replaced that ethical and political engagement with the possibilities of a different television. This can be placed in the context of a broader shift in the status of the study of culture and cultural theory, and most particularly of the idea of critique as a political practice. If it seemed 'radical' to introduce the teaching of film and television into the Higher Education curriculum in the 1970s, when it was possible to set it against competing 'elitist' cultural canons (of literature or art, for example), the teaching of film and television studies now can easily be accommodated within the student-as-consumer-led marketization of Higher Education since the 1990s, in which studying everyday cultures can be emptied of politics and ethics, and often seems to promise instead the easy option of describing the familiar and celebrating the phenomenal.

At each stage of *Screen*'s history, the engagement with television theory has been more intermittent than the engagement with the film theory it seemed to shadow, and the 'project' of television theory may have been overshadowed by the perception of a *Screen* theory of cinema which became the equivalent of the International Style in architecture, a grand theory which has never quite accommodated the localism of television. At the same time, I would not want to suggest that the 'campaigning' period of the 1980s was the high point of screen theorizing. For many, particularly for an international readership that saw *Screen* retreating back into a Little Britain, it was, precisely, a vanishing point.

While *Screen* might not claim the same historically defining role in international television theory as it might claim in the development of film theory, it has made distinctive and consistent contributions which have helped to define the ways television is theorized and studied today, the ways in which television is thought about and taught about. It would do a great deal of injustice to several generations of contributors and editors not to recognize the strength and vitality of the journal's tradition of writing about television. There has been a continuous and continuing engagement with feminist television studies. Alongside the work on the institutions of television, there has been groundbreaking work on the forms of narrative and address in popular genre from sitcom to crime series. Most

consistently, over at least thirty years – and, if read symptomatically, over the entire fifty years of *Screen*'s existence – there has been a persistent concern with issues of realism on television: with the gap between fact and fiction in drama and drama documentary; with actuality and the construction of reality in documentary; and with the performative 'reality' of reality television. This ongoing debate continues to inform critical theorizing, constituting the last twenty years as the high point of *Screen*'s engagement with television: twenty years in which the journal has staked out its territory more consistently than in any other period. The best of the work on television – particularly when television also includes video – no longer lies in the shadow of film.

In thinking about the continuity of *Screen*'s engagement with television, and, indeed, in thinking about a certain consistency which underpins *Screen*'s theorizing of both cinema and television, what struck me when I read Piper's essay as part of my chronological review was how much it resonated with earlier debates on documentary and drama documentary; how much it illuminates and rearticulates them.

My objective in this paper is to explore certain aesthetic issues that arise from the dichotomous relation between drama and reality television, partly in order to refigure the debate outside of well-rehearsed arguments for and against 'dumbing down'. The arrival of reality formats such as the docusoap was greeted in many quarters as a mutation (or aberration) of the documentary tradition, and the new formats' increasing reliance on fictional techniques has almost invariably been a source of regret. That is, the emphasis is largely on what they are no longer (factual, and for this we can also read 'objective', serious, truth-telling, and so on), rather than what they have become (dramatic, or perhaps 'playful', in both senses of the term).³²

32 Helen Piper, 'Reality TV, *Wife Swap* and the drama of banality', p. 273.

It illuminates them with its attention to reality as performance: more precisely, to the performance of spontaneity in the form of improvisation, the improvised moment which sometimes escapes the regulatory frame of television's routines and which places both performer and viewer in a position of playful risk. While I would still resist the abandonment of 'seriousness' or the disavowal of the desire for a television that is other than it is, Piper's argument seems to me to confound any easy opposition of 'seriousness' and 'playfulness' in a way that offers a way out of the more nostalgic forms of elegy. Most of all, her essay reminds me, as a number of other recent articles on television have done, that *Screen*'s theorizing today is still fundamentally what it was for Heath and Skirrow in 1977: '*stopping*' television to analyze and theorize its performance of the subject.

Yet I want, still, to return to mourning television. More particularly, I want to set 'mourning' in tension with 'celebration': a celebration which resonates with the 'wishful psychosis' which Freud sees as tied up with mourning, the means by which 'the lost object is psychically prolonged',³³ a form of what he describes elsewhere as 'the omnipotence

33 Freud, 'Mourning and melancholia', p. 253.

34 See Sigmund Freud, 'Totem and taboo', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, Volume XIII, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 2001), p. 75-99.

of thoughts' that is associated with 'magical thinking'.³⁴ To identify this tension, let me comment briefly on a BBC serial drama, *Occupation*, transmitted in one-hour episodes over three consecutive evenings in June 2009. *Occupation* went on to win the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Award for Best Drama Serial, but it first appeared with very little pre-transmission promotion, and my initial viewing of it was somewhat distracted, *happening* to watch the first episode in that characteristic way because it occupied time rather than *choosing* to watch it by setting time aside. Admittedly, the time it occupied was the nine o'clock slot when television time is most likely to become special time – not just 'anytime', then. The detail of my memory is fuzzy and impressionistic, and my aesthetic judgment is based on affect and immediacy rather than analysis. But it is worth saying that for most of the final episode I was somewhere beyond speech, beyond judgement and, I guess, beyond aesthetics: taken by surprise by television in a way which is quite distinctive, and quite different to the package of the box-set.

Written by Peter Bowker, directed by Nick Murphy and produced by Laurie Borg, *Occupation* focuses on three British soldiers (played by James Nesbitt, Stephen Graham and Warren Brown) who have been stationed in Iraq: one remains in the army because he believes in the mission; one returns to Iraq because he has fallen in love with an Iraqi and wants to help the Iraqi people; and one joins a private sector security firm operating, at considerable profit, in Iraq. The narrative is untidy, driven by character and situation rather than by system or the achievement of goals; but it is that 'untidiness' (the term is not exact) which gives the drama its affective force: the untidiness of the television narrative, an untidiness which allows contingency in. This untidiness is not at all the same as the well-shaped multistrand narratives or the 'puzzle narratives' which have engaged recent film studies, and which actually shut contingency out. In *Occupation*, the untidy narrative plays out contingency which is both tragic and absurd, engaging the surreal insanity of an absurd situation, the sheer craziness of invasion and occupation, the humanity and the lack of it, the fear and the panic and the pain of this war – giving the drama an effect and an affect for which television theorizing, even today, struggles to find a language.

The serial deserves more extended analysis. Here, however, I turn to it because it allows me to focus both my celebration and my mourning, and particularly because it allows me to establish that whatever mourning for television I may wish to do, it is not – as it so often is in the tones of elegy – for the loss of that strange quality called 'quality' (to borrow Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's phrase), or for some extended Golden Age of Television that ended just before the present generation of critics and scholars was born. In the long tradition of British television drama, *Occupation* seems to me to be as good as it gets, and to be a 'serious' drama in a way that allows me to shed some of the embarrassment of 'seriousness': an ethical television 'working through', in a sense, of television's own complicity in sanitizing and rationalizing a dirty and chaotic occupation. It was serious in

35 Theodor Adorno, 'Prologue to television', in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 50. First published as 'Prolog zum Fernsehen', *Rundfunk und Fernsehen*, no. 2 (1953).

36 Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1958), p. 79.

37 These had been the characteristic responses to the dramas and drama documentaries by the Ken Loach and Tony Garnett partnership and by other 'politically motivated' television dramatists of the 1970s and 1980s.

38 Ricciardi, *The Ends of Mourning*, p. 2

a way that perhaps only television among modern media can still occasionally be: the domestic threat lurking in the corner of the living room; television which, defying Adorno, does not simply 'make us once again into what we already are, only more so';³⁵ television, on the contrary, that for a moment breaks the contract, takes us by surprise and changes the perspective – precisely *because* we least expect it on television; television drama reminding us, as Artaud said it was the function of theatre to do, that the sky can still fall on our heads.³⁶

So this is my reason to be cheerful, sustaining and refreshing my 'magical thinking'. My reason to mourn is that, despite its recognition by television professionals in the BAFTA award, at the point of transmission and public reception *Occupation* seemed to pass unnoticed. No Conservative Member of Parliament denounced the BBC; the tabloid press did not call for the head of the BBC Director-General, Mark Thomson; no retired Colonel pointed out that they had got the regimental uniforms wrong; the programme was not debated on *Newsnight* immediately after the screening to restore the cherished 'balance' of the BBC.³⁷ It was *just television*, absorbed into Godard's *paysage audiovisuel*. It was private affect rather than national trauma, the kind of national trauma which, famously, *Cathy Come Home* (1966) or *Up the Junction* (1965) had once been. It was approved by the television critics of the quality press and by the professional elite, but it barely seemed to register on the Richter scale of the polity: it was apparently business as usual, 'the relentless spectacle of the present'.

What I am mourning, and what I think screen theorizing has to continue to work through, is the loss of a public space – television's part in the waning of the public sphere, its complicity in the performance of a subject which is constantly in play. But a theory which is only ever fascinated by the perpetual play of difference and endless innovation, or which replaces analysis of the institution – the institution of text and subject as well as of television – with description of the phenomenon, is ill-equipped to imagine a different television, one which escapes the 'relentless spectacle of the present'. Such a theorizing, as Ricciardi warns, 'compromises our understanding of the past and sterilizes our vision of the future, as it deprives our culture not only of utopian inspirations and messianic inclinations, but also, finally, of the very notion of justice'.³⁸ In the face of this challenge, the business of screen theorizing today is still to work through the changing configurations of subject and space; to identify the points at which the institution and its routines break open to other possibilities of meaning and engagement; to find new and appropriate ways of testing ideas and aesthetics, politics and ethics; and to imagine them differently.

- 1 *Screen*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2009), 'Screen Theorizing Today: a Celebration of *Screen's* Fiftieth Anniversary', ed. Annette Kuhn; 'In Focus: SCMS at Fifty', *Cinema Journal* vol. 49, no. 1 (2009), pp. 280-76; Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference 2010: SCMS@50/LA, 'Archiving the future, mobilizing the past', <http://www.cmsstudies.org/documents/SCMS_2010_Conference_Program_archive.pdf> [accessed 25 September 2010]. The history of the BFI is the subject of an AHRC-funded Research Project. See Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Christophe Dupin (eds), *The British Film Institute: the Government and Film Culture 1933-2007* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming), and <<http://www.history.qmul.ac.uk/research/bfi/>> [accessed 25 September 2010]. See also Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (eds), *Inventing Film Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Dana Polan *Scenes of Instruction: the Beginnings of the US Study of Film* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).
- 2 Editorial, *Screen*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1971), p. 4.
- 3 Anne Morey, *Hollywood Outsiders: the Adaptation of the Film Industry, 1913-1934* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Eric Smoodin *Regarding Frank Capra: Audience, Celebrity, and American Film Studies, 1930-1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); John Nichols, 'Countering censorship: Edgar Dale and the film appreciation movement', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2006), pp. 3-22.

reviews

Terry Bolas, *Screen Education: From Film Appreciation to Media Studies*. Bristol: Intellect, 2009, 384 pp.

RICHARD MALTBY

With both *Screen* and the Society for Cinema and Media Studies recently celebrating significant birthdays with retrospective events and issues, screen studies has taken to addressing its own history as a practice and an academic discipline in what feels somewhere between an *apologia* and a midlife crisis.¹ Terry Bolas's *Screen Education* is a useful addition to these histories, and to some extent a corrective to the heroic accounts of theoretical combat in some participants' memoirs. Bolas was briefly *Screen's* first joint editor, when the journal aimed to provide a forum for debates about film teaching, before the *événements* and counter-reformation at the British Film Institute (BFI) in 1971 launched the journal's new emphasis 'on theory'.²

Screen Education is in large part a history of *Screen's* early publisher, the Society for Education in Film and Television (SEFT), but Bolas's broader concern is with the development of screen education as a working practice in British education, particularly in schools. His narrative begins in the early 1930s, with the report of the Commission on Education and Cultural Films, concerns about the effect of cinema on children, and the need for training in film appreciation as a means of providing 'an education in taste' (p. 17). In the USA, film appreciation developed with significant industry support as a defensive strategy intended to resist the critiques of moral and cultural conservatives.³ In Britain, without the same level of industrial integration or production base, film appreciation was a much less generously funded grassroots activity with its origins in teachers' enthusiasm for popular cinema's absence of a class-based cultural hierarchy. In the immediate postwar years and again in the 1960s, the screen education movement was an incidental beneficiary of the raising of the school leaving age, with film appreciation regarded as

an appropriate activity for the less privileged participants in state education.

In 1950, the BFI appointed Stanley Reed as its first Film Appreciation Officer, and the Society of Film Teachers (SFT) was established 'to promote the teaching of film appreciation in colleges, schools and the Youth Service' (p. 51).⁴ Despite their emphasis on programmes that would 'help young people to enjoy their filmgoing', film appreciation retained an element of anti-Americanism and a concern with protecting 'the moral and cultural standards of the nation' by 'immunising' children against Hollywood's corrupting influences (p. 71). By 1957, when Paddy Whannel joined the BFI, film appreciation's obligation to educate working-class taste to middle-class standards was beginning to be questioned. Whannel argued for the extension of 'that part of education which deals ... with the evaluating of experience' into the popular arts, although his own evaluations retained their Leavisite inheritance in their comparisons of the worthy and unworthy (p. 106).⁵ During his tenure as Head of BFI Education from 1964 to 1970, Whannel stressed the need for a body of scholarship to underpin the teaching of popular culture in schools. Bolas argues that both cultural studies and media studies evolved in the margins of formal education: in university extra-mural classes and secondary modern schools, to audiences of predominantly working-class students, with 'fewer preconceptions of how their teachers should select and present objects for study' (p. 101).⁶ By the 1960s, film study was seen as an appropriate topic for colleges of education to ensure the supply of suitably trained teachers, but not a subject for universities: in 1968 Stuart Hall noted the absence of any 'serious, intense, extended, disciplined study of the cinematic image', directors, genres or national cinemas in British universities (p. 169).⁷ A year later, the University of London's Institute of Education rejected a proposal for a one-year course in film study because the proposal 'could not demonstrate that there existed the literature and theory to support it' (p. 173).

Recognizing that the establishment of film study at university level was a crucial element in its legitimation, Whannel constructed the BFI's Education Department as an 'academy in waiting', actively recruiting a 'restless and articulate group of film intellectuals' committed to research and writing and operating 'like a University Department' as it took a central role in shaping a film culture in Britain.⁸ The BFI's governors, however, forcibly rejected Whannel's vision, insisting that it was not the role of the Institute to 'perpetuate any single doctrine or dogma ... about film'. In the summer of 1971 they acted on the report they had commissioned from Asa Briggs, then vice-chancellor of the University of Sussex, which recommended that the Education Department abandon research and revert to its previous role of supporting grassroots work. Whannel and five of his staff resigned.⁹ This sacrifice improbably created the conditions of *Screen's* possibility, as the Briggs Report became the ironic, accidental midwife to *Screen* Theory. In the funding compromises negotiated by BFI chairman Denis Forman, SEFT achieved a substantial

4 The SFT became the SEFT in 1959. For an account of the 'rebirth' of the BFI following the 1948 Radcliffe Report, see Christophe Dupin, 'The postwar transformation of the British Film Institute and its impact on the development of a national film culture in Britain', *Screen*, vol. 47, no. 3 (2008), pp. 442-51.

5 Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, *The Popular Arts* (London: Hutchinson Educational, 1964).

6 Tom Steele, *The Emergence of Cultural Studies 1945-65* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1997).

7 Stuart Hall, 'The impact of film on the university', *University Vision*, no. 2 (1968), p. 29.

8 Manuel Alvarado and Edward Buscombe, 'Cultural strategies: publishing at the British Film Institute', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 47, no. 4 (2008), p. 135.

9 These events are also recounted in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'The 1970 crisis at the BFI and its aftermath', *Screen*, vol. 47, no. 4 (2008), pp. 453-9.

- 10 Alan Lovell, 'The BFI and film education', *Screen*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1971), pp. 13-26.
- 11 Paddy Whannel to the Chairman, BFI, 4 September 1971, *Screen* vol. 12, no. 3 (1971), p. 42. Colin McArthur, 'Two steps forward, one step back: cultural struggle in the British Film Institute', *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, no. 4 (2001), pp. 112-27.
- 12 In John Ellis's retrospective view, *Screen* was 'a surrogate for wider political activity, feeling in the post 1968 world that the realm of ideas was important but that there was no place for intellectuals in the Left political process at the time'. Bolas, *Screen Education*, p. 232.
- 13 See Philip Rosen, 'Screen and 1970s film theory', in Griveson and Wasson (eds), *Inventing Film Studies* pp. 265-97, for one of several more sympathetic accounts.
- 14 Andrew Britton, 'The ideology of *Screen*', *MOVIE*, no. 26 (1978/9), p. 13.
- 15 Edward Buscombe, Christine Gledhill, Alan Lovell and Christopher Williams, 'Statement: why we have resigned from the board of *Screen*', *Screen*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1976), pp. 106-9; Paul Willemen, 'Remarks on *Screen*: a spiralling trajectory', *Southern Review*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1983), quoted in Bolas, *Screen Education*, p. 281.
- 16 Editorial, *Screen*, vol. 20, nos 3-4 (1979), p. 11.

degree of financial autonomy, despite having just published an issue of *Screen* devoted to a blistering critique of the BFI's chaotic management (p. 189).¹⁰

Screen emerged as an artefact of repressive tolerance, while elements of Whannel's vision of the BFI as the 'agent of Film Culture' survived, more or less tenuously, in some of its other departments.¹¹ Appropriated by literary dissidents in search of greenfield intellectual real estate on which to develop their grand theories of signification, ideology and the subject, *Screen*'s vanguardist project provided self-identified organic intellectuals with a vehicle for 'blowing up the Humanities' (p. 232).¹² But the dialogue between educationists and researchers that Whannel had anticipated failed to take place, as what Bolas terms the 'intellectual cell' at the core of SEFT engaged in 'displays of intellectual experiment around the translation and transmission of European thought' (p. 197).¹³ Even during the 1970s, *Screen*'s intellectual dominance was much less monolithic than it was and is often represented as being, and the extent of what Andrew Britton called its 'tyranny of hermeticism' could easily be overstated (p. 279).¹⁴ While *Screen* undertook an insurgent theoretical project that might underpin the development of a range of intellectual activities across the educational system, it did not generate a unified body of theory so much as a sequence of arguments with which students of film studies struggled for the next twenty years. The *Screen* Editorial Board's lack of unanimity surfaced intermittently, most conspicuously in 1976, when the divisions over the journal's commitment to psychoanalysis and/or obscurantism led to a further round of resignations, while other journals, some founded by ex-members of its Board, emerged to contest its 'theoreticism' as a form of academic careerism.¹⁵ By 1978 *Screen* had become an academic journal, sustained in significant part by US university library subscriptions, but as a 1979 editorial admitted, *Screen* had not disturbed 'the film and television establishment as it ought to; it merely irritates it'. (pp. 277, 279)¹⁶

Among the BFI's significant implementations of Whannel's legacy was its funding of a series of lectureships in British universities, beginning in 1973 with Robin Wood's appointment at Warwick. But as Bolas stresses, many of the developments establishing film studies, including regional curriculum initiatives, an 'O' level programme and the great majority of the positions in higher education that opened in the 1970s, came into existence through the work of people intermittently associated with SEFT and the BFI but outside the *Screen* orbit. Like film appreciation in schools twenty years earlier, the embedding of film studies in British higher education in the 1970s was in practice accomplished by individual academics in English, languages or American Studies pursuing an enthusiasm into a course, and then a course into an appointment. *MOVIE* may well have been more influential than *Screen* in this process, because of its more direct engagement with the dominant critical framework in literary studies.

17 David Buckingham, 'Lessons from SEFT', *Initiatives*, no. 11 (1989) p. 3.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

19 For example, Bolas advises us on p. 252 that 'The poor condition of the SEFT archives is a particular problem here in that [Steve] Neale under his third priority area states that "Colin MacCabe's proposals should be taken seriously." No trace of these proposals has been found.' *Editors' note: Many of these documents have since come to light and are being housed in a new Screen archive.*

In Bolas's judgement, although SEFT claimed to be 'the only major national professional society' representing the interests of film and television teachers, it repeatedly failed to bridge the intellectual distance between *Screen*'s militant theorizing and the teachers it notionally spoke for (p. 261). In both *Screen* and *Screen Education*, the privileging of theory positioned writing about classroom practice as 'not merely hopelessly unglamorous, [but] tantamount to bourgeois empiricism' (p. 342).¹⁷ In Thatcher's Britain, SEFT's attempts to present itself to government and the press as 'an authoritative voice on matters of media education' were as unconvincing as they were ambitious. In David Buckingham's brutal 1989 analysis, 'for most media teachers in schools and in further education, SEFT was at best an irrelevance and at worst an obstacle' (p. 341).¹⁸ On the other hand, with academe successfully breached on both sides of the Atlantic in the mid 1980s, *Screen*'s editorial practices became simultaneously more catholic, more commercial and more academic. As a result, material addressing the specific concerns of British media education appeared less frequently, since it had little appeal to the overseas audience that made up half of the journal's subscriber base. SEFT had in practice become two disconnected organizations, one producing an international academic journal, the other seeking to operate under an 'impossibly broad' agenda covering the entire field of media education. By the end of the 1980s, the economic logic for its closure was compelling: the BFI's grant to SEFT took eighty-five per cent of its budget for media education initiatives, but *Screen* had fewer individual subscribers than in the 1960s.

From Bolas's localized and in some respects parochial perspective, this narrative appears less a heroic storming of the barricades of academe than an ironic comedy, in which an organization of enthusiasts survived the lean years, only to expire in the moment of their integration into society's curriculum. There are passages in his account when it is difficult to see the forest for the contents of each issue of *The Film Teacher* or the inventory of furniture in 70 Old Compton Street. There are other times when this reader, at least, was reminded of *Screen*'s disengagement from history by the frequency with which key documents, including the Briggs Report, have failed to survive.¹⁹ The hard edge of his conclusion is secreted away in an appendix on the expansion of media studies since 1990. If film and media studies are now embedded in the academy along with most of the characters in this story, their courses do not produce students who go on to teach media in schools, where screen education is still largely undertaken 'with varying degrees of willingness by those who regard themselves primarily as teachers of other subjects' (p. 353). The institutionalization of media education has certainly not diminished the frequency or volume of conservative attacks on it for dumbing down the curriculum. The Humanities have been blown up, and only the unlikely tenacity of student numbers will keep them from being swept away in the recession.

20 For an account of the 2007 events, see 'In Focus: The British Film Institute', ed. Toby Miller, *Cinema Journal*, vol. 47, no. 4 (2008), pp. 121-63.

The *événements* and 'realignment' at the BFI in 2007 bear an eerie resemblance to the 'Crisis of Film Education' of 1970, suggesting that its management's attitude to history remains more closely aligned with Henry Ford than George Santayana.²⁰ But at least we are all professors now.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjq038

Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (eds), *Inventing Film Studies*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2008, 480 pp.

E. ANN KAPLAN

Inventing Film Studies, an intriguing and smart volume, emerges at an interesting moment for film studies – a moment which is embedded in the volume's title. On the one hand the title claims hitherto unexplored origins for knowledge about film (the editors 'invent' film studies in bringing these origins to light, showing that film study was 'invented' long before the 1970s); on the other hand, in concluding the volume with David Rodowick's thoughtful meditation on the loss of film studies' object – that is, the loss of strips of celluloid with images moving through a projector onto a screen – the editors suggest that we need to 'invent' a new kind of film study specifically for the digital age.

Anxiety about the loss of film studies' object in an increasingly digital age has indeed been getting attention, but 2009-10 has also seen the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, like *Screen*, celebrate its fiftieth anniversary, encouraging reflections on the history of the organization – its development from a small group of male cinematologists to the current flourishing institution with about 2000 members – and on the history of cinema and of film studies. Such highly visible accounts include those by Dudley Andrew (who has been keeping his eye focused on the progress of film studies for years), Rodowick and Dana Polan, whose volume about the early US study of film (especially pertinent to the volume under review) appeared in 2007.¹

Inventing Film Studies inserts itself amongst such histories, but takes a related, if gently polemical, approach. Given the title, one inevitably thinks of Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams's *Reinventing Film Studies*,² and indeed we learn that volume partly inspired this one. If the film culture wars around the perceived dominance of screen theory have waned as film studies enters its new digital era – if not a post-theory moment, as some claim, then at least a rethinking theory moment – tensions around screen theory quietly remain.

The editors of *Inventing Film Studies* outline two main goals for their project: first, to present a detailed examination of the social, political and intellectual milieux in which knowledge of cinema has been generated; and second, to consider the historically contingent ways in which these

1 Dana Polan, *Scenes of Instruction: the Beginnings of the US Study of Film* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007). Polan's essay, 'Young art, old colleges: early episodes in the American study of film', also appears in Grieveson and Wasson's collection. See also Dudley Andrew, 'The "three ages" of cinema studies and the age to come', *PMLA*, vol. 115, no. 3 (2001), pp. 341-51, and 'The core and flow of cinema studies', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 35, no. 4 (2009), pp. 879-917; D. N. Rodowick, 'An elegy for film theory', *October*, no. 122 (2007), pp. 91-109.

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2 Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (eds) *Reinventing Film Studies* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2000).

3 Grieveson and Wasson cite *Reinventing Film Studies* along with Janet Bergstrom's introduction to her edited volume *Endless Night: Cinema and Psychoanalysis, Parallel Histories* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999). They note in their introduction that Gledhill and Williams 'explore the questions that confront us at the start of a new century', and that 'From this starting point, they move on either to reframe or to depart from the concerns of the 1970s when film first became an academic subject of study' (my emphasis).

varied ideas and practices of film study came to be assembled into a discipline (p. xii). Their mission includes correcting what they regard as a misconception about the history of film studies, occasioned in part by the dominance and (perhaps) self-importance of Anglo-American 1970s film theory (with its French influences), often cited as the beginning of film theory.³ Grieveson and Wasson claim that long and complex histories have been omitted from prevailing accounts of what the study of cinema has been and ought to be (p. xii), and their aim is precisely to provide such histories.

I want first to commend the editors for fulfilling this aim brilliantly before commenting on the claims involved. The volume brings together historically important information about the generation and circulation of early film knowledge through exhibitions and writing. These activities – no matter what the venue or how broad the dissemination – added up to a cultural presence of film; together, they produced a consciousness about cinema as an object even as large audiences continued to consume film merely as entertainment. Readers learn about the growth of film culture and its impact on audiences as well as ultimately on the disciplining of film. Generating such film knowledge from the turn of the century to the 1960s entailed time-consuming and exacting archival research, and I welcome what I am able to learn from these efforts. While the editors' project relates closely to Polan's concerns, their purview is broader than his, including attention to early kinds of knowledge about film other than educational initiatives. The editors stress the mutual influence between such knowledge and film production as well as detailing ideologies about the increasingly mass audience for film. The sources researched for the project include, in Section One, government-funded studies (often linked to the social sciences and not often researched by film scholars), and studies related to educating modern citizens. Section Two illuminates spaces outside the university (libraries, museums, national film institutes, film councils, film clubs) where films were seen, discussed, their status as art debated, and considered in relation to politics. Section Three explores the contributions of select film journals, reviews and little books, from 1940 to the present, to film scholarship, the institutionalizing of film studies and its development today as a (still barely) recognized academic discipline. The last section discusses contrasting aspects of new technologies (the digital era, DVDs and back stories) and explores the impact of all this on film studies.

Given my limited space, let me extract from the wealth of essays packed into this useful volume just a few that deal with the important questions provoked by *Inventing Film Studies*. First, in the introduction the editors claim that work on cinema and ideology emerging from the political and intellectual contexts of the later 1960s marks a continuity with, not a break from, earlier traditions of study (p. xvi). Grieveson and Wasson argue that the centrality of poststructuralist theory in film studies is partly a consequence of disciplinization itself, which necessarily creates hierarchies of valued work (p. xvi). This position is most eloquently

4 Interestingly, the digital era, through highly developed restoration techniques and DVD technologies, has enabled access to hitherto elusive silent films, generating a huge subfield in Cinema Studies, evidenced by the highly successful annual Pordenone Silent Film Festival and the innovative Women's Silent Film Project.

argued in Haden Guest's 'Experimentation and innovation in three American film journals', in Section Three. I found the mention of hierarchies of valued work slightly defensive, reminding me of some tense years in the development of film studies around screen theory that the field has more or less moved beyond. Those tense years, as Philip Rosen explains in his essay in this volume, have to do with a perhaps misplaced, but at the time seemingly necessary, effort by film scholars to show that film studies was a fully rigorous kind of research with high standards, relying on well-tried methods with rules. Unfortunately, this sometimes translated into arrogance and the dismissal or marginalization of certain forms of film writing. *Inventing Film Studies* in part aims to reclaim such marginalized areas as the passionate study of key directors or film stars, of overlooked silent films, and of histories of certain genres.

However, it is possible that Guest overreacts to this past in his enthusiasm for what he has found in his detailed study of the early film journals, *Films in Review*, *Cinemages* and *Film Culture*. One aim is to claim continuity between the writing about film in these journals, which Guest sees as enthusiastic scholarship, and academic film study. But in what specific ways is this true? The argument is never fully fleshed out. And is all writing about cinema scholarship, or does such a claim put apples and oranges in the same basket? Guest claims that 'the real importance of the postwar journals ... lies less in their individual eccentricities and differences than in their collective attempt to reinvent film scholarship and criticism' (p. 241).

I am grateful for Guest's highlighting of the specifically US contribution to film study – a contribution often given less weight than contributions from Paris and London. The postwar journals he reminds us of, and the acclaimed critics writing for them (such as Andrew Sarris; though there is little mention of Molly Haskell or Pauline Kael), clearly had a huge impact on furthering knowledge about cinema as a cultural force, and especially about silent film and its great directors, already marginalized because of the relatively recent emergence of sound.⁴

However, a tension emerges here in regard to situating different kinds of writing about cinema. What kinds of writing do we want to encourage from film students at university? Should professors accept research essays that look more like a film review than a theoretical analysis? For the purposes of training students, if for no other reason, might we want to create not *hierarchies* but *distinctions* amongst kinds of writing about film?

Obviously different professors will encourage different kinds of writing in their classrooms, often determined by the level of the course and the particular students. I personally find useful Dudley Andrew's distinction between amateur and professional film discourses, where 'professional' is taken to mean academic writing as opposed to journalism or film reviewing. The latter obviously provide archival and historical information of great value to academic writing, and are related to the utility of fan discourse around much popular culture for academics. But each has its own place and purpose.

Mark Betz's related essay is clearer than Guest's in its analysis of the changing nature of film writing through his carefully researched and fascinating study of books about film in the postwar era, with a special focus on the role of what he calls 'little books'. These little film books, which were indeed small in size, offered a more expansive idea of film culture than later larger and weightier academic books. Betz's concluding statement echoes a sentiment found across the volume, nostalgically pitting the vitality, passion and love for cinema in early film culture against late 1980s academic research. For Betz, the passion was lost for a couple of decades through the disciplining of film studies in the universities, and he yearns for a return to such passion in a field not dying, as some claim, but too much in thrall to scholarly rules of completeness, of institutional verification, of order (p. 341). Once again, such judgements need to be situated in relation to the context for film writing. And I would question why passion and scholarly order must be separate – they are not mutually exclusive!

Betz's useful study of the role of BFI Publishing in bringing film into the academy is echoed in the conversation between Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen about the development of the Education Department at the British Film Institute and the role of Paddy Whannel in setting BFI Publishing on its way. In titling their discussion 'From cinephilia to film studies', Mulvey and Wollen implicitly mark a moment when the disciplining of cinema began. I recall when in 1960 Whannel commissioned several of us teaching film courses in London to write the first little books, under his oversight. The diversity of educational institutions at which we worked (film was not yet being taught in a university) was of interest to Whannel. These little books were not yet film scholarship as such, but guides to teaching innovative film courses, already leaning towards cultural studies *avant la lettre*.⁵ I suggest that *Inventing Film Studies* authors excavate a film culture that represents not continuity in a strict sense but work that prepared for film's entry into the academy. There it took many different forms that built on and superseded early film culture. Pre-professional film study developed into academic and professional education (in the sense of a series of courses organized for increasing complexity and ending in the conferring of degrees in film studies), but this continuity does not mean the two shared similar concerns, aims or outcomes. The film knowledge from before and after World War II studied in the volume played its own important role at its moment of production, while post-1960s writing and 1970s and 1980s film theory each likewise played a role in its academic moment.

As noted earlier, film studies is at a stage of uncertainty about its objects and its future largely as a result of the profound changes developing in the wake of the increasingly digital era. In a strange way, the new anxiety is bringing film scholars in closer connection with film directors and non-academic critics, as new ways of communicating

⁵ Jim Kitses and I wrote one of these little books detailing the innovative courses we taught at Kingsway Day College, a college of further education, where young people whose schooling had ended at age fifteen and who were in low-level jobs were released one day a week for more education. Our book was called *Talking About the Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1963, 1974). Other books were written by Stuart Hall, A. P. Higgins and Albert Hunt, as I recall. Jim and I lectured to Youth Clubs and participated in weekend retreats organized by the British Film Institute to educate young people about film and critical analysis. Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel's coauthored book, *The Popular Arts* (London: Hutchinson Educational, 1964), represents the ways teachers of film outside academia were approaching cinema study at the time.

information about cinema develop. Betz mentions the BFI's invitation in recent years to well-known novelists and actors to write books on cinema. He also mentions a continuity that I think *is* a reality (and would have liked more about in the volume), namely the expansion of the sort of film knowledge the authors found in early film culture. This takes place outside the universities but regularly involves academic film scholars. Informal talking and writing about film occurs even more energetically and prolifically outside academia now than in the prewar and postwar eras, thanks to the new internet technologies: blogs about film, personal reviews on IMDb sites, and, as one essay in the volume usefully details, commentaries accompanying films on DVD, DVD backstories with actors, directors, crews, and so on; to say nothing of regular journalism reviews which are found everywhere today. A. O. Scott's *New York Times* discussion of cinema (to cite just one example) offers the high quality of much postwar writing about film before the high theory moment. There are also television film commentaries by the likes of Roger Ebert and James Lipton (not addressed in this volume), where film is talked about with passion and delight; on the Turner Classics channel in the USA, Alec Baldwin chats about forthcoming films with the programme's host. But while film scholars and students take advantage of this knowledge for what information it contains, academics interpret and analyze such writing or discussion for what it reveals about general public spectatorship and about cultural values. As Dudley Andrew puts it – referring to Dana Polan's *Scenes of Instruction*, though the same applies to this volume – the early scholars who are celebrated belong as a *topic* in film studies more than as part of its *root* system (p. 884) as the editors of *Inventing Film Studies* would have it.

In conclusion, let me note that *Inventing Film Studies* raises a question of the relevance of prior knowledge about film to today's digital era, whether that be from 1900 or 1960, or the knowledge produced by screen theory. The authors of *Inventing Film Studies* assume its relevance, but do not argue the case as such. Rodowick perhaps does best in this respect in the book's final essay 'Dr Strange Media, or how I learned to stop worrying and love film theory', where he suggests that the structures and aesthetics of the image as studied by film scholars are not threatened by digital production and exhibition. I would have appreciated more discussion of this issue in the volume, and also of psychoanalysis and cinema, to say nothing of studies showing the influence of new technologies on the brain's systems. But that really does lead us to ask if we need to invent new methods for analyzing multiple new platforms, as they influence the object's psychological meaning and affective impact, and address the relations between memory, emotion and film.

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Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009, 345 pp.

CHRIS BERRY

From my perspective, Bliss Cua Lim's *Translating Time* is one of the most exciting contributions to film studies in a while, and a welcome addition to the growing number of Asian horror/ghost/fantastic film genre analyses. Yet it is so much more, because it is also an ambitious intervention in the literature on film and time. Lim describes her intersection of genre analysis and theorization of cinematic time as bringing the following benefits:

temporal critique offers another way to look at the politics of genre, that is, to conduct genre studies in a manner that is attuned to complex, historically overdetermined differentials of power among diverse, noncontemporaneous audiences, without pigeonholing screen texts into either-or pronouncements of ideological persuasion. (p. 40)

However, as well as a new way of approaching the politics of genre, *Translating Time* is also an important challenge to certain ways of understanding duration or, as Lim terms it, 'durative time'. It is therefore a 'must-read' for film scholars of all sorts, not only those of us interested in Asian cinema.

First, *Translating Time* extends and reorients existing work on Asian horror and ghost films. The global cult consumption of 'Asian Horror' (or 'Asia Extreme', as it was dubbed by the distribution company Tartan) has also helped to create a wave of books on the topic. Among the more academic titles are Colette Balmain's *Introduction to Japanese Horror Film*, Jinhee Choi and Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano's *Horror to the Extreme* and James McRoy's *Nightmare Japan*.¹ As that short list indicates, the existing emphasis tends to be on Northeast Asia, and Japan in particular. However, Lim is more interested in the colonized than the colonizer. And so, although she does include Japanese originals in her analysis of the Hollywood Asian horror remake phenomenon, these are not her primary examples. Instead, she shifts the focus by including the Philippine director Mike de Leon's *Rites of May* (1976); Indonesian-American scholar and filmmaker Fatimah Tobing Rony's experimental video *On Cannibalism* (1994); various Philippines genre films on the *aswang* monster; Hong Kong director Stanley Kwan's *Rouge* (1987); Philippine director Butch Perez's *Haplos* (1982); and a particularly moving analysis of Korean director Kim Jee-woon's *A Tale of Two Sisters* (2003). This reorientation of the field is valuable by itself. But it is the theoretical ambition of Lim's approach to the films that distinguishes *Translating Time* and makes it invaluable to a wider readership.

Lim not only takes on board Bergsonism but, more importantly, she also forces it into an engagement with postcolonial theory. My sense is that some colleagues have been eager to see film studies develop a strong

¹ Colette Balmain, *Introduction to Japanese Horror Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008); Jinhee Choi and Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, *Horror to the Extreme* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010); James McRoy, *Nightmare Japan* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008).

interest in Bergsonian duration and the cinema for conservative reasons. It has enabled them to breathe a sigh of relief, wave goodbye to what they have perceived as the straitjacket of ideological critique – along with feminist, queer, critical race and postcolonial interventions – and return happily to the realm of ‘pure cinema’. Lim’s book, however, effectively counters that effort to restore the cinema as a fetish to hide behind by arguing that the non-homogeneous times cinema can register are not a space of pure duration outside history and politics but the mark of violent political change and the effort to refuse it. By combining Bergsonism with postcolonial criticism, Lim blocks the temporal turn in film studies from retreating into formalist abstraction without allowing it to collapse back into the ‘good film, bad film’ dynamics that have indeed come to bedevil much politically engaged work in the field. Instead, she opens the way to a complex understanding of what she calls ‘immiscible times’ that, like oil and water, exist in the same space but can never be dissolved into each other.

To achieve this intervention, Lim twists Bergson to her own ends. To authorize her act of necessary perversion, she cites Deleuze’s famous description of his own book on Bergson as ‘a kind of buggery, or ... immaculate conception. I imagined myself getting onto the back of an author, and giving him a child, which would be his and which would at the same time be a monster’ (cited on p. 69). While Lim takes on board Bergson’s resistance to the homogeneous and teleological time of modernity, she resists the binary framework that sees modern time as a perversion of an idealized and abstract pure time outside history. Instead, she draws on historians of time like Reinhart Koselleck, anthropologists like Johannes Fabian and postcolonial theorists like Dipesh Chakrabarty. All of these scholars see different conceptions of time as bound up with different social and cultural orders and the struggles amongst them, be they the transition to modern homogeneous time and the disciplining of the working class in Europe and North America or the violent interventions of colonialism and its positioning of others as ‘backward’ and to be harnessed for the needs of the modern metropolis.

Having metaphorically buggered Bergson to his own benefit in her first chapter, Lim moves fearlessly on to Todorov in the second. Like Todorov, she is interested in the fantastic as a space in which immiscible times may be conjured up in an uncanny manner. She argues, however, that Todorov’s structuralist approach betrays a deep political commitment to modernity. This is not only because he takes it for granted that to entertain non-homogeneous time schemes is simply wrong, leaving no space for the marvellous within the modern. It is also because he depends upon the idea of the ideal reader. This concept is as abstracted as Bergson’s notion of pure duration and ignores the reality that all readings are historically and socially located and invested. Focusing on this problem, Lim turns to the *aswang* cycle of films from the Philippines to show how different attitudes to the films are caught up in class-based national politics within the

country. This intervention demonstrates powerfully the ‘durative’ dimension of reception and different modes of reading.

The remaining chapters of *Translating Time* build on these foundations. In the third chapter, Lim examines Kwan’s *Rouge* and Perez’s *Haplos* as ghost films that activate nostalgic allegories to disrupt modern and national time. Space in these films turns out to hold memories, which the ghosts see and make visible to contemporary people. However, Lim notes that the ghosts are female, and a conservative gender politics therefore plays across this nostalgia that otherwise challenges modernity. The final full chapter turns to the Hollywood remake of Asian horror films as a question for temporal critique, concerning not only the ghostly times invoked in the films themselves but also the times of production practices. Lim enters the debates around the Hollywood remake practice. Many Asian producers already have the potential for future remaking in mind at the launch of their projects and see the remake phenomenon as indicative of Asian cinema’s success. But Lim notes not only the deracination in Hollywood’s adaptation processes that try to erase local origins, but also the vastly different levels of profitability that result from this practice under the structures of globalization.

In conclusion, Bliss Cua Lim’s *Translating Time* makes me see Asian horror film in a new way. She brings forth the ‘impossible’ temporal dimensions behind spectrality and digs deep to understand its implications in different times and places. Furthermore, she reconceives temporality in the cinema in a manner that functions as a powerful corrective to any embrace of duration as a space of pure abstraction free of the power plays of history and space. Any work committed to understanding cinema as an art of time would do well to take on board Lim’s insights.

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Carl Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator’s Experience*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009, 280 pp.

Torben Grodal, *Embodied Visions: Evolution, Emotion, Culture and Film*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009, 324 pp.

TIM J. SMITH

‘[T]he expression and elicitation of emotion in film is a central element of the film experience, an experience that is worthy of study in its own right.’ (Plantinga, p. 5). This is the central tenet of both Plantinga’s *Moving Viewers* and Grodal’s *Embodied Visions*. Both books explore the experience of the cinematic viewer from a cognitive perspective employing theories and analytical methods from philosophy, psychology and neuroscience. In *Moving Viewers*, Plantinga presents a general theory of affect elicitation in film through the detailed analysis of the affective

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methods utilized by Hollywood film. While acknowledging that focusing on Hollywood film may underestimate the role of culture and history in shaping experiences of other national and genre film traditions, Plantinga argues that the global influence of the Hollywood style and its emphasis on avoiding 'audience boredom at all costs and attempt[ing] to elicit strong, clear ... emotions throughout the viewing process' (p. 7) makes it the ideal starting point for a theory of cinematic emotion.

Plantinga and Grodal are not the first film theorists to tackle affect in cinema. Screen theory, as Plantinga calls the dominant form of film theory in the 1970s and 1980s, arose from psychoanalytic/Marxist theory and focused on the deep levels of viewer pleasure originating from repressed and unconscious desires. The spectator is conceived of as a 'hypothetical entity, position, role or space constructed by the text' (Plantinga, p. 17). By conceiving of the viewer as an essentially passive consumer of the film text, screen theory investigated the viewer experience by performing textual analysis of film. As a psychologist, I find the idea of using textual analysis of an artefact in order to understand internal human states to be highly obtuse and the antithesis of the modern psychological method. Psychology has come a long way since Freud's psychodynamic theory and his use of textual and conversational analysis to probe the inner workings of the human mind. The dominant theoretical approach in psychology today is cognitivism. Arising in the 1960s and 1970s, cognitivism uses an information-processing approach to understand human behaviour: information is received through the senses, processed both consciously and unconsciously by various brain systems, and gives rise to thought and action. Within a cognitivist framework, a film is a stimulus which has no meaning or affect in the absence of a human observer. In order to understand the expression and elicitation of emotion in film, the factors contributing to the viewer's processing of the film must be theorized and examined. By applying cognitive methods to film, Plantinga and Grodal are attempting to bring film theory in synch with modern cognitive psychology.

Of the two, Plantinga is the most accommodating to traditional exponents of film studies. His introductory chapters clearly lay out his 'cognitive-perceptual' approach, how it relates to previous approaches, and how he intends to reclaim previously psychoanalytically co-opted terminology such as 'desire', 'pleasure' and 'fantasy'. He refers to his approach as 'cognitive-perceptual' to highlight the role of both conscious, logical processes and unconscious, automatic responses in shaping viewer experience. This clarification is essential, as cognitive film theory is often erroneously attacked for assuming a purely conscious, logical viewer. As Grodal explains, this is a criticism of 'first generation Cognitivism, which argued that the disembodied computer could be taken in its entirety as a model for human cognitive processes' (p. 14). Second-generation cognitivism, which is the dominant form today, conceives of the human mind as embodied and is inspired by neurology and biology. The biological urges and unconscious dispositions that previously occupied

screen theorists combine with conscious cognitive processes to shape the overall experience of a film.

In Plantinga's thesis, emotions are considered to be intentional states, or in his words 'concern-based construals ... judgments or perceptions by an agent of how a situation affects her or his concerns' (p. 9). Associating intentionality to emotions may seem odd, as emotions are often conceived of as automatic, reflexive processes, such as being scared by the sudden appearance of a bear. However, Plantinga's conceptualization of emotions reflects current philosophical and psychological theories of emotion, including those of Robert C. Roberts and Ronald D. Sousa. When the bear appears, the image of the bear is processed rapidly through neural pathways including the amygdala, and physiological fear responses such as increased heart rate will begin before conscious recognition of the bear has occurred. However, these automatic responses are subsequently qualified by the viewer's assessment of their own situation, and only then does the final emotion take shape. In the context of film viewing, the concerns of the viewer are qualified by the knowledge that what is being experienced is a fiction and there is no immediate danger. However, the reflexive foundations of emotions remain the same as in the real world. A sudden appearance of a bear will elicit the same physiological response in the cinema as in the wood (with the possible exception of running away!). Plantinga argues that it is what happens next – the construal – that shapes our emotional response to film and decides whether we experience a direct emotion (our own), sympathetic/antipathetic emotion for a depicted character, or a meta-emotion, that is an emotion directed at our own experience of the film, such as laughing at the fact that a clichéd horror movie moment made us scream.

Plantinga mostly uses his cognitive-perceptual framework to perform cognitive readings of well-known Hollywood films. After specifying a taxonomy of spectator emotions based on current cognitive psychological theories, Plantinga performs cognitive readings of popular films to demonstrate how films shape, manipulate and support the conscious construal processes leading to emotions. However, Chapter Four signifies a radical shift away from the conscious to the direct appraisal of film by viewers. Incorporating ideas of direct perception, emotional contagion and affective mimicry, Plantinga describes how film capitalizes on our innate tendencies to recognize other people's actions and emotions by mental simulation and unconscious mimicry, such as when we smile in response to another person's smile. Central to this discussion is the recent neuroscience discovery of 'mirror neurons'. Mirror neurons are neurons in the frontal cortex of macaque monkeys that respond both when the monkey performs an action and when it observes the action being performed. Similar mirror neurons are believed to exist in humans and are thought to represent a mechanism by which the actions of another become a message that is understood by an observer without any cognitive mediation.¹ The mirror neuron theory of action understanding is central to a bold new movement in cognitive psychology known as embodied

¹ Giacomo Rizzolatti and Laila Craighero, 'The mirror-neuron system', *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, no. 27 (2004), pp. 169-92.

- 2 Torben Grodal, *Moving Pictures: a New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition* (Oxford: Clarendon/Oxford University Press, 1997).

cognition. The information-processing approach of cognitive psychology assumes that cognitive processing operates on abstract representations. Embodied cognition proposes that abstract representations of actions are not required, as perception is accomplished by the reactivation of part of the neuronal network involved in performing the action. Embodied cognition is a godsend to cognitive film theory. By connecting perception to mental simulation and action, embodied cognition provides a direct pathway between the depiction of human action and emotion on the screen and the perceptual and affective response of the viewer. Plantinga uses embodiment to explain the emotional contagion effect of facial closeups, the physicality of action sequences, and the synaesthetic effects of music, editing and narrative.

Embodied cognition also plays a central role in Torben Grodal's thesis in *Embodied Visions*. Whereas Plantinga only dips a toe in embodiment, Grodal dives right in. Grodal's thesis constitutes not only a radical approach to understanding the film experience but an incidental grand theory of embodied cognition. The brilliant audacity of Grodal's work lies in its reluctance passively to consume cognitive theories and apply them to film. Instead Grodal attempts to synthesize all contemporary cognitive psychology into a unifying theory: PECMA flow (perception, emotion, cognition and motor action). Originally published in Grodal's *Moving Pictures*² but thoroughly updated and rigorously applied here, the PECMA flow model provides a theoretical framework within which a viewer's experience of a film can be considered as the 'processing flow that follows the brain's general architecture, namely a flow from perception (ear and eye), via visual and acoustic brain structures, association areas, and frontal brain structures to action (motor activation)' (p. 146). This flow is not abstract and computational but a function of the cyclical interaction between cognition, neurology, evolution and culture. Our response to a film is shaped by the structure of our brains. But our brain structure has been shaped through evolution and personal experience by exposure to culture and cultural artefacts such as film. In accord with Plantinga's idea of 'concern-based construal', Grodal believes that our instinctive responses to film are qualified by cognitive factors such as personal experience and culture. However, while Plantinga mostly applies his theory to mainstream Hollywood film, Grodal focuses on cinematic extremes: the universalism of children's films, love and desire in romance and pornography, and the extreme emotions induced by horror, fantasy and melodrama. The extreme and visceral aspects of film viewing fascinate Grodal. Extreme sensory experiences such as abrupt editing and horrific or sexual imagery elicit reflexive physiological responses, such as increases in heart rate, galvanic skin response, eye movements and electrical activity of the brain. These physiological responses may be qualified or filtered by personal tolerances and experience but the stimulus-response relationship is universal. Both Grodal and Plantinga argue that the form and techniques used by canonical film narratives have evolved to tap into this universal system.

- 3 Tim J. Smith, 'Film (cinema perception', in E. B. Goldstein (ed.), *The Sage Encyclopedia of Perception* (London: Sage, 2009).
- 4 David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in the Movies* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006).

Supporting evidence for this cognitive compatibility hypothesis is beginning to emerge from complementary research in cognitive psychology.³

Modern filmmakers are so in tune with the potential of this universal stimulus – response system that it has given rise to a whole style of filmmaking referred to by David Bordwell as 'intensified continuity'.⁴ Most contemporary Hollywood films conform to this new style through their use of rapid editing, extreme changes in shot length, excessive camera movement and de-emphasis on spatiotemporal continuity. As discussed by Plantinga in Chapter Four, the result of this intensified style is a new 'impact' aesthetic that prioritizes the visceral and reflexive pleasures over traditional continuity. Grodal does not discuss intensified continuity directly but the affective principles he identifies in genre films are directly applicable to understanding this new style. Hollywood wants to ensure that we enjoy the cinematic experience and come back for more. The most reliable way to elicit an affective response in all members of the audience is to utilize direct 'biophysical stimulation ... [at] levels far below language and consciousness' (p. 13). Only a cognitive theory of film affect can account for the intensification of the Hollywood style.

Both Plantinga's and Grodal's books represent wonderful examples of cognitivist investigations of film affect. Their topics overlap considerably but their scopes are radically different. Plantinga is careful to qualify the scope of his theory, focus on mainstream Hollywood film, acknowledge his omissions, explain his use of terminology, and use copious in-depth examples to assist the reader's understanding. By comparison, Grodal's approach veers wildly from detailed cognitive neuroscience to philosophical and textual analyses. Even as a cognitive psychologist I feel I have learned a lot about cognitive neuroscience from Grodal. Unfortunately, I fear some of the details of his PECMA flow model will be inaccessible to readers from film studies and may deter many who might ultimately benefit from it. Grodal's book might have been more accessible if he had spent more time on detailed film readings using the PECMA flow model. For me, the most exciting part of Grodal's book is his detailed analysis of Lars Von Trier's oeuvre. Von Trier's conscious manipulation of the audience lends itself perfectly to analysis within Grodal's framework. I am surprised that this wonderful chapter was relegated to the appendix, as I would have loved to have seen similar analyses of other master manipulators such as Alfred Hitchcock or David Lynch.

Plantinga's and Grodal's books represent a coming of age for cognitive film theory: mature, well reasoned and non-confrontational explorations of the film experience and of the ways in which films make us laugh, cry and scream – yet keep coming back for more.

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Vicki Callahan (ed.), *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History*. Detroit, IL: Wayne State University Press, 2010, 460 pp.

SOFIA BULL

I think primarily of *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History* as a particularly useful map of the field of feminist film history as it appears today. It is, however, a complex map: old abandoned houses are still marked out for those who might wish to make them habitable once more, while undiscovered areas are highlighted to encourage the exploration of new territories. In other words, *Reclaiming the Archive* is a book situated in the present, but one that manages to stay firmly rooted in the history of feminist film studies while functioning as a source of inspiration for future feminist scholars.

The field of feminist film history is usually understood as having emerged from a general dissatisfaction with the feminist film theory of the 1970s. In part, this can be viewed in light of a more general tendency within film studies to position history and theory as oppositional. However, during the last fifteen years there have been many voices pointing out the inaccuracy of such binary thinking, and arguing instead for the need to see these approaches as intertwined. In her introduction, Vicki Callahan makes it clear that *Reclaiming the Archive* is intended as one such voice, correcting this type of 'historical amnesia *within our own history as feminist film scholars*' (p. 4). It is thus part of an ongoing self-reflexive turn which transforms feminist film history into feminist film historiography and enables continuations, and points of collaboration, between feminist theory and empirically grounded historical considerations. This fruitful play between theory and history, past and present, is written into the very structure of the book: the sequence of its four sections suggests a loose chronological order, in which each focuses on an issue important for the history, the present, and perhaps the future, of feminist film studies.

The first section, 'Gazing Outward: the Spectrum of Feminist Reception History', focuses on spectatorship. The importance of this theme for 1970s feminist film theory is thus acknowledged, while a majority of the articles exemplify the subsequent move towards reception studies dealing with specifically female spectatorship. The historic link becomes most apparent in the inclusion of Laura Mulvey's article 'Unmasking the gaze: feminist film theory, history, and film studies' (p. 17), which, as Callahan rightly points out, should be considered a 'supplement' (p. 12) to Mulvey's seminal *Screen* essay from 1975, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema'. Considered in tandem, these two essays mirror more general developments within feminist film studies: the psychoanalytic framework has been replaced by considerations of social and historical context. This example demonstrates the usefulness of this anthology for teaching, if combined with a number of texts taken from the history of feminist film studies. As a whole, *Reclaiming the Archive* is also

valuable for students as a smorgasbord displaying the different approaches and methods used within feminist film history today. In this particular section, I found Annette Kuhn's article on girls growing up with cinema in the 1930s an important example of how ethnographic methods can be used within cinema studies (p. 58). Considering the growing importance of fan studies, and the general interest in more empirically grounded methods amongst younger scholars, more such examples are needed.

The second section, 'Rewriting Authorship', serves as a reminder of how the focus on spectatorship and representation in the 1970s resulted in a search within the film industry for positive examples of women who actually had agency. The 'rewriting' of the section title rightly suggests that the articles manage to avoid the classic pitfalls of auteurism-centred feminist film history. Callahan and her contributors are thus part of a strong move to vitalize what has been called 'lost and found' research. The Women Film Pioneers project run by Jane Gaines, for example, is immensely important in demonstrating the sheer number of female film workers from the silent period yet to be rediscovered. Like Gaines and others, *Reclaiming the Archive* seeks to widen the concept of authorship, which has traditionally been almost solely assigned to the role of director. Patricia White's article on Mercedes de Acosta is interesting for its placing of authorship partly within celebrity culture, alongside cinema (p. 231). Furthermore, *Reclaiming the Archive* supplies good examples of auteurist approaches that, in Lauren Rabinovitz's words, 'look for places of women's creativity within cinema but that historicize economic and social conditions relative to specific women's lives'.¹ These are no simplistic utopian celebrations; Ayako Saito's interesting discussion on the complex relationship between the actress Ayako Wakao and the director Yasuzo Masumura (p. 154) is just one of the articles considering the difficulties women have in their attempt to establish agency.

Early cinema has traditionally been the focus of most 'lost and found' research and it still holds a strong position within the field of feminist film history, enjoying support from the successful Women and the Silent Screen conference series. It is therefore fitting that the third section of *Reclaiming the Archive*, 'Excavating Early Cinema', presents articles dealing with female film workers, female fans and the representation of women during the early period. This topic has seen many excellent publications already, with *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema* especially notable among a number of recent monographs, anthologies and special journal issues.² This section of *Reclaiming the Archive* stands up very well amongst its peers, but I do think it is advantageous that the anthology as a whole has a wider historical range. As early cinema research has already attracted much attention, there is definitely a sense that later histories have been somewhat neglected. I think it is safe to suggest that we are now seeing a tendency within the field to encompass more recent periods. The relatively new Women's Film History Network – UK/Ireland, for example, works to encourage research on the whole of film history.

¹ Lauren Rabinovitz, 'Past imperfect: feminism and social histories of silent film', *CineMAS*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2005) pp. 21–34.

² Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra (eds), *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

Finally, 'Constructing a (Post)feminist Future' discusses postfeminism, cyberfeminism and new media. As its title suggests, this section is clearly intended to point to the future of feminist film studies, but I find it most useful as a reflection of the contemporary situation. Callahan's enthusiasm for digital media and the internet is indeed contagious, and there is no doubt that new media is an important field of research that deserves more attention from feminist scholars. In her introduction Callahan argues for an appropriation of the technology/terminology of new media which would enable 'Feminism 3.0': 'a new network of collaboration, across generations as well as across other divides of sexuality, race, and ethnicity' (p. 6). While I do find this metaphorical construct seductive, I am not completely convinced that the technology itself shows such feminist potential. Anna Everett's article on cyberfeminism and cyberwomanism does, however, provide an insightful discussion that left me feeling more optimistic about the potential for feminist uses of the internet (p. 384). As a film studies scholar working predominantly on television, I was also happy to find a couple of discussions on television texts in this section. However, I do believe that feminist considerations on television deserve a more prominent place within the field. Considering the many calls for crossing traditional divides and widening the field, I hope the future promises even stronger feminist collaborations between film studies, television studies and media studies.

In conclusion, Callahan and her contributors have established a strong sense of unity by so thoroughly intertwining the considerations of gender, sexuality, class, race and ethnicity. I am also confident that their attempt at 'presentifying' the field (p. 2) will pay off, and that *Reclaiming the Archive* will convince a new generation of scholars of the continuing importance of feminist film studies.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjq034

Flavia Laviosa (ed.), *Visions of Struggle in Women's Filmmaking in the Mediterranean*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 212 pp.

EYLEM ATAKAV

Visions of Struggle is a unique collection which provides an excellent example of comparative feminist praxis whilst stimulating critical debate around women's filmmaking, the political, social, cultural and industrial contexts within which women's films are produced, and the films' representations of women's issues. The volume consists of ten insightful essays focusing on identity, gender politics, political resistance and violence in relation to both cinematic representation and the lives and status of women in Mediterranean culture. The chapters study women's cinemas of Israel, the Maghreb, Turkey, France, Greece, Italy, Spain, the

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- 1 Judith Mayne, 'Review of Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Women Filmmakers of the African and Asian Diaspora: Decolonizing the Gaze, Locating Subjectivity*', *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 30, no. 1 (1999), p. 238.

Balkans and Syria – disparate countries and cultures united by their geographical location. The volume creates a dialogue between these cultures and nations whilst contributing to 'transnational knowledge production' (p. xii), which is the key purpose of the Comparative Feminist Studies series of which this book is a part. It contributes significantly to the documentation of women's cinemas and to the conceptualization of two sets of practices – feminism and film – within the context of a vast array of cinematic production 'far beyond Hollywood, both geographically and metaphorically'.¹

This collection of theoretical essays (using methodologies from film, cultural and women's studies) is not only a celebration of women's filmmaking but a critique of the patriarchal structures that permeate women's everyday lives and the cinema screen. This dual task is achieved through incisive analyses at both a textual and a sociological level. Despite differences in technique and approach towards sexuality, gender and politics, the directors (as well as the contributors) are united in their goal of engaging in discussion of women's struggles. Whilst considering the efforts of women filmmakers, the volume reveals commonalities of theme – nation, exile, home, violence – all emerging from a shared experience of struggle, both political and personal. All of the films analyzed in the volume come from the late 1990s or 2000s and share the characteristics of countercinema.

Laura Mulvey's foreword focuses on the notion of space, arguing that space unifies the essays and the films in this volume, functioning as a reference to a range of meanings 'from the social to the metaphoric; from the lived and the everyday to the screen space of cinema' (p. xv). Thus the volume builds and critically reflects upon the plurality of thought and the potential offered by cultural exchange with and by women, films and cultures brought together within a spatial configuration. However, I would like to make a few comments on another central and recurring figure, both in this book and in women's films – the concept of violence. Violence resonates across multiple layers of reference: physical, emotional, political, economic, clandestine, sexual and military. In her discussion of the cinema of the Balkans, Marguerite Walker terms this all-pervading violence 'multiple violences', in which 'its multiple subjects, including the filmmaker herself are caught up' (p. 106). All the films discussed in the volume draw on a range of feminist critiques of violence, and the consequences of masculinist cultures and practices on the lives of women. For example, Yosefa Loshitzky's analysis of *My Land Zion* (Yulie Cohen-Gerstel, Israel, 2004) focuses on what can be characterized as emotional violence experienced by the female protagonist at the level of identity and metaphor, personally and collectively, within the context of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, Europeanization and Judaization. Violence also appears in the context of exile and dislocation in Florence Martin's chapter on Maghrebi women's cinema, whilst Carrie Tarr concentrates on physical violence through a discussion of mutilating and mutilated bodies on screen. She explores the extent to which French women's films address

the issue of 'women's violence in relation to violence against women in contemporary European society' (p. 77).

In her examination of *Waiting for the Clouds* (Yeşim Ustaoğlu, Turkey, 2003) Ruken Öztürk writes about the burdens placed upon women's shoulders – both literally in carrying heavy loads as workers and metaphorically in the oppressive roles imposed upon them by men in the private sphere. The issue of honour killings is scrutinized, both in the introduction to the volume and in the conclusion, by Flavia Laviosa, who offers a careful and critical account of this violation of human rights by referring to the dramatic confluence of events which crosses boundaries of space, culture and religion to become a worldwide crisis.

Áine O'Healy's chapter focuses on mafia violence in Italian cinema as well as women's roles in the hierarchy of a male-dominated subculture. In an examination of Greek cinema after 2000, Maria Paradeisi questions violence towards women as metaphor by looking at films that feature independent women who 'transgress' society's expectations. Thus violence manifests as depression and suicide in the struggle for freedom of the talented woman character in Hala Alabdallah's *I am the One who Carries Flowers to Her Grave* (Syria, 2006). Censorship can also serve as another form of violence – against freedom of expression. As Martin asks in the case of the Maghreb: how can women represent 'that which you are not supposed to film or say in a society ruled by a strong regime with powerful political and cultural censorship?' (p. 38).

This thought-provoking volume offers a response to the ways in which the female body is controlled in contemporary patriarchal society and discourse. It raises several questions for the reader, perhaps most importantly that of how women can represent violence when violence is damaging for them. The Spanish director Icíar Bollain's answer to this – 'seen violence is not the same as suggested violence' (p. 46) – is worth considering here, and the depiction of male violence towards women is 'never condoned, it is always condemned' (p. 57). What filmic strategies, then, can women filmmakers use to represent violence whilst simultaneously critiquing it? In other words, how can they depict the violence that women experience in a way that does not add to the already existing violence towards women on the cinema screen?

The strategies that women filmmakers use may differ, yet they are connected in their adoption of similar processes of revision and reconceptualization in their work. It is important for them to devise strategies whereby they can make their voices heard. They offer invention in cinematic style as well as stunning examples of experimentation. One common rhetorical strategy utilized in many of the films analyzed in the volume is an autobiographical approach. Women directors make an effort to engage in self-expression, even as they engage in expression in a more radical and communal manner: political, social or cultural. *Take My Eyes* (Icíar Bollain, Spain, 2003) is a case in point. As Mónica Cantero writes in her chapter, this film depicts 'the mechanism and linguistic implications of an entrenched national discourse in which gender violence is encoded

male–female interaction’ (p. 46). It presents the audience with an extraordinary insight into the protagonist’s struggle. As suggested by its title, the film becomes the main character’s eyes, so that the audience becomes engaged and responsible while profoundly identifying with the character herself. Hence, by asserting a vision shaped by female experience, the dominant male perspective is challenged. Equally important are the use of autobiographical narratives and the depiction of violence through a form other than social realism. Another strategy which Tarr describes is the ‘embedding of visceral imagery within narratives relating to female desire and female violence’, which may have the potential to ‘disrupt and destabilise normative constructions of sexual difference’. (p. 64)

This collection raises questions about the extent to which feminist film theory can or should be applied to films from different cinemas of the world. It also prompts the question of why it should be assumed that any other cinema is (or can be) an appropriate object for a theoretical discourse developed elsewhere. Where feminist discourses have been marginalized, cinematic artistic creation by women about women deserves our critical attention. The volume contributes to a new language informed by women’s studies, sociology and cultural studies. It also contributes to, and critically reflects upon, an ‘escape’ from claustrophobic, patriarchal, constraining, violent space into a shared transnational space of female collectivity. This raises questions about the relationship between the real and its representations, and this is ultimately a matter of aesthetics. As Christine Gledhill adroitly puts it, ‘a change in the status of the real requires a corresponding change in conception of the aesthetic practice which seeks to represent the real’.² As a work written by female scholars, about female directors who make films about the issues and experiences of women, *Visions of Struggle* proves to be a fascinating and unique study that will make a significant contribution to feminist knowledge.

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Emilie Bickerton, *A Short History of Cahiers du cinéma*. London and New York, NY: Verso, 2009, 156 pp.

CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS

Nothing serious by or about *Cahiers* has been published in English since Jim Hillier’s well presented and annotated choice of articles from the 1950s, followed by a more ponderous selection from the period 1961–68.¹ So it is useful to have Emilie Bickerton’s narrative and polemical account, even if there is something quixotic about attempting a *short* version of such a complicated and interesting story, without a bibliography, and with proofreading and editorial lapses. Her main sources, apart from the journal itself, seem to be Antoine de Baecque’s

2 Christine Gledhill, ‘A contemporary film noir and feminist criticism’, in E. Ann Kaplan (ed.), *Feminism and Film* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 68.

1 Jim Hillier (ed.), *Cahiers du cinéma, Volume 1, The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, in association with the British Film Institute, 1985). Jim Hillier (ed.), *Cahiers du cinéma, Volume 2, 1960–68: New Wave, New Cinema, Re-evaluating Hollywood* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, in association with the British Film Institute, 1986). The two later volumes in this series, edited by other hands, do not confront or elucidate the material they present.

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- 2 Antoine de Baecque, *Histoire d'une revue, 1. A l'assaut du cinéma, 1951-1959* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1991). Strangely, Bickerton makes no reference to Volume II of this work, *Cinéma tours detours*, which covers the period 1959-81, but it seems likely she used it too.
- 3 Antoine de Baecque, *La Cinéphilie: invention d'un regard, histoire d'une culture, 1944-1968* (Paris: Fayard, 2003).
- 4 Including his valedictory *Persévérance: entretien avec Serge Toubiana* (Paris: POL, 1994); published in English as *Postcards from the Cinema*, trans. Paul Douglas Grant (Oxford and New York, NY: Berg, 2007).
- 5 'Cinéma/idéologie/critique', *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 216 (1969), pp. 11-15.

history of its early years² and his later book on cinephilia,³ together with material from *Cahiers* and elsewhere by long-time contributor, and coeditor between 1974 and 1981, Serge Daney,⁴ and discussion with some surviving contributors. From these she produces a condensed historical outline and a broad point of view.

The outline: after a 1930s and 1940s prehistory, the yellow *Cahiers* of the 1950s articulates its radical belief in cinema as a specific but impure art form and a drive to challenge traditional and aesthetics-free views through the concepts of mise-en-scene and authorship. Between 1959 and 1966 Jacques Rivette and others demand that the magazine's critical range broaden to make more room for the modern world, contemporary intellectual currents, new cinematic forms from a range of sources (such as Antonioni and Buñuel), and openly political content. Some of the contributors make 'New Wave' films which become linked in a loose general sense with the reputation of the magazine.

In the late 1960s the emphasis on politics intensifies: the famous 'Cinema/ideology/criticism' editorial⁵ means that theoretical and critical discussion of film is to be set in the Althusserian framework of ideology. In the early 1970s the magazine embraces Lacanian psychoanalysis and establishes a notional allegiance to the French Communist Party. It celebrates a few auteurs from around the world and discusses some arthouse or experimental films, but has effectively adopted an anti-cinema stance. The Maoist movement in France is known to be in decline, but *Cahiers* attempts to set up a Revolutionary Cultural Front, presented at the 1973 Avignon Festival; it bombs hopelessly. By now publication is down from the traditional eleven issues per year to four or five, and few people are reading them.

From 1974 to 1981 the magazine is run in tandem by Daney and Serge Toubiana, an ex-Maoist with managerial skills. Their aims are to relegitimize film by moving back towards the mainstream, with accounts of Hollywood films and a regular letter from Hollywood from 1978, and towards criticism, by allowing engagement with the processes of reading particular films and developing some different intellectual tendencies (such as Deleuze and Foucault). They attack naturalism in filmmakers who show 'a familiar France with no hint of theatricality; directors reflecting little on cinematic technique' (p. 95) as a facet of constructing strong narratives round marginalized groups and issues of poverty and racism, but these narratives say nothing of aesthetic or ideological value about their protagonists' situations.

At the same time, *Cahiers* continues to support great outsiders like Godard, Straub/Huillet and Robert Kramer, considers the second life of cinema on television, and tries to reanimate some of the magazine's previous interests: mise-en-scene (in disgrace during the ideological years), Bazinian realism, good political cinema as opposed to bad political cinema. In 1981 Daney leaves to write on a daily basis in *Libération*, first about film, later about culture in general. *Cahiers* is run by Toubiana – who prints criticism by younger writers who become filmmakers (such as

André Téchiné and Olivier Assayas) and continues to draw on historic contributors – and from 2000 by a succession of editors of no great status, who follow an inclusive pattern in which almost everything is acceptable.

The broad point of view: although she does not engage closely or in detailed form with the writings of Bazin or Rohmer, Bickerton accepts the validity of *mise-en-scène* criticism. On authorship she wishes *Cahiers* had attended to the deeper implications of the term or carried forward the extensive groundwork the concept required.

This would have meant developing a better grasp of all types of cinematic language, challenging the meaning of the *mise en scène*, judging the significance of elements not controlled by the director, and extrapolating on the way a director works and how this transfers to the finished result. (p. 117)

The first and third of these suggestions are clear, the second may be so if by challenging she means debating, and the fourth is not clear at all; but there are things here which may be worth following up.

Bickerton deals succinctly with the effects and the product of the early 1970s 'ideological' period: 'the tenet that all films are political was a dead end for critics of cinema' (p. 83). But she is perhaps rather too impatient with the latter-day attempts to put something together out of the two contradictory impulses: for art and for politics, which have driven the journal forward. Throughout the second half of its lifetime to date, she believes, the magazine has effectively been dead: 'the overall effect – so much to choose from, so little at stake, had, and to this day reproduces, the mind-numbing quality of an up-market consumer report' (p. 110). It should have stuck to its guns. In the 1980s it 'lost its belief in both the radical project and the capacity of the public to engage with serious ideas about cinema. It gave up its aspiration to make history' (p. 149).

What is the *Cahiers* legacy, and in what forms can it still be used and passed on? At its best it implies a supple grasp of the connections between realism and antirealism, owing much to Bazin and his attention to genre, history and popular culture; a commitment to *mise-en-scène* more or less as Bickerton defines it: 'a vital notion that allowed critics to engage with a film more completely: a care for the cinematic presentation encouraged a way of watching that concentrated on how narrative was expressed through form' (p. 146), with the proviso that *mise-en-scène* deals with ideas and emotion as much as narrative; and a concept of authorship interpreted less as personal expression and more as forms of poetic language which can consolidate the medium and push it to new variations and discoveries. An example of this kind of usage can be found in the critical writing of Jean-Claude Biette, who was involved with the magazine as a school student in the 1960s and returned to write about authorship, style and television in the 1980s and 1990s. Prompted by *Le Rayon vert* (Eric Rohmer, France, 1986), he defines the greatest moments in Rohmer's films as those in which

6 Jean-Claude Biette, 'Le Papillon de Griffith' and 'Le Journal des Cahiers', *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 388 (1986) pp. x-xi. Biette is also good value when he describes meeting Rohmer in the early 1960s: he 'spoke little and already looked like Goethe'. Biette, *Poétique des auteurs* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma/ Les Editions de l'étoile, 1988), p. 10.

7 Serge Daney, 'Qui dit quoi, mais où et quand?', *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 250 (1974), pp. 38-42.

8 Daney, *Persévérance*, p. 83.

9 Texte rédigé collectivement, 'Young Mr Lincoln de John Ford', *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 223 (1970), pp. 29-47.

10 Jean-Michel Frodon, 'La langue ne ment pas', *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 643 (2009), pp. 24-26.

he captures, beyond spoken language, in silent faces, in looks, in space, in nature, the almost invisible movement of the world. This trade secret, which is perhaps nothing other than the transmutation of an intimate understanding of the world, rediscovers some phrasings from the ample rhythms of Hawks, from the dark documentarism of Murnau (where he meets Straub) and from Rossellini's Mediterranean waiting to see.⁶

This means of engaging with the articulations of motion, genre, look and timing could, I think, be deployed in connection with more figures or other features of diction over and above the practices of individual filmmakers, and thus be capable of extended use in thinking about film language.

The legacy also comprises Rivette's search for freedom and incompleteness, in which the audience can also be the hero of the film, and spectators are always active; the recognition that filmmakers modify, or at least heighten in some distinctive way, the expression of social ideas and experiences by restating them in the terms of the film itself (my reformulation of 'Cinema/ideology/criticism' to make it usable in a positive sense); an insistence that the critic be aware of the differences between what a film says and the ways in which it utters or performs it, as articulated by Daney.⁷

The best of this work, apart from Biette on Rohmer, does come from before 1981. Perhaps the truth is that if we hold the panoply of realism, authorship, spectatorship and enunciation to one side, as also belonging to many other schools of criticism, *Cahiers* has embodied only two headline urges, each ferocious. The necessity of mise-en-scene: 'there had to be a truth of the film which was not that of its production method, its context, of the place it was shown in and how it was received';⁸ but also the wish for a political reading of cinema which could be linked with the aesthetic thrust normally embodied in mise-en-scene or related figures of language. The wish was profound, but the execution just not good enough. At its best, mise-en-scene produces Rohmer's work as critic and filmmaker as well as a lot of work by others; ideology produces René Allio's *Moi, Pierre Rivière, ayant égorgé ma mère, ma soeur et mon frère ...* (France, 1976) and 'John Ford's *Young Mr Lincoln*'.⁹

Both emphases can be seen at work in recent *Cahiers*. The two opening shots of André Téchiné's *La Fille du RER/The Girl on the Train* (France, 2009) are praised for the way their pure cinematographic writing constructs a space for the film, a universe defined by its inner tensions, and its division into two complementary halves allows it to display a subtle political intelligence and an immense generosity of storytelling – which includes the wonderful and worrying possibility of reversing fiction itself.¹⁰ *L'Heure d'été/Summer Hours* (Olivier Assayas, France, 2008) is criticized for the 'eternal cul-de-sac' of the accuracy with which it portrays its characters:

by sticking to the level of psycho-sociological demonstration, Assayas condemns his film to espouse the dominant ethic of adaptation, to put

11 Cyril Neyrat, 'Changement d'adresse', *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 632 (2008), pp. 16–18.

on this middle bourgeoisie's grey fatalism without injecting it with playfulness, without making a gap for an aesthetic approach which could put his characters to the test, make them something other than mouthpieces for the answer to a problem.¹¹

It is not possible to say yet what personal computing and the expansion of the digital domain will do to cinema and the way publics experience it. If the current period is committed to the notion that culturally and emotionally it knows everything already, that the excitement of belief and challenge can only be expressed in terms of technology and technocracy and the possibilities of change which come through them, then the *Cahiers* programme might be in difficulty. But an attempt to recast it in largely digital terms collapsed in 2008. And more of the spirit and concerns of the early *Cahiers* have lived on in the later ones than Bickerton wants to acknowledge.

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Damian Sutton, *Photography, Cinema, Memory: the Crystal Image of Time*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press, 2009, 296 pp.

DAVID FLEMING

Investigations into the history and phenomenology of photography and film can generally be divided into three overlapping methodological categories, outlined as philosophical/aesthetic, semiotic/sociopolitical and technical/industrial approaches. In *Photography, Cinema, Memory: the Crystal Image of Time*, Damian Sutton synthesizes and reinvigorates these existing paradigms by catalyzing a new and exciting encounter with the radical philosophical theories of Gilles Deleuze (and Félix Guattari). In the abstract machine of visual culture that surrounds us, he argues, photography remains the prime molarity; and from this, cinema is derived. Initially setting out to reinterrogate the traditional links between cinema and photography, Sutton utilizes the lens of cinema the better to understand photographs (p. ix). In a lively engagement with the history of photography – ranging from the earliest camera obscuras through to contemporary digital images generated in the age of the 'kino-brush',¹ – Sutton aims to uncover a Bergsonian-inflected image of pure time and duration within photographic images. These are ultimately articulated through Deleuzian models of the 'time-image' and the 'crystal of time'.² Throughout the project he thus strives for a new way to see and understand photography, and ultimately aims to peel back the surface of the image to reveal a world of images beyond (p. x). Furthermore, he works to lay out a new taxonomy of photographic time-images that he illuminates through the work of photographers like Eugène Atget, Andy Warhol and Nan Goldin. The photographic images are also often compared and contrasted with cinematic representations of time found in the films of the Lumière brothers,

1 See Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), p. 307.

2 See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: the Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005).

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Michael Powell, Alain Resnais, Chris Marker and Christopher Nolan, amongst others. Throughout his various investigations into photography and film, memory and time, Sutton subjects photography to a Deleuzian-Guattarian treatment to demonstrate how we can perceive becoming and immanence in the photographic image, and understand the photograph as always coming into being. In this manner, the project reengages with the entire history and theory of photography and offers new critical approaches the better to understand and appreciate photographs.

Traditionally, the most enduring and influential ideas informing the study of photography can be traced to the writing of critics such as André Bazin and Roland Barthes. For them, the birth of photography ostensibly marked the most important event in the history of the plastic arts, with photography destined eventually to derive cinema (which has a completely different phenomenology). For Bazin, photography's indexical nature ensured that it functioned as an embalmer of time, with the photograph able to capture a causal image and resurrect it from time's natural corruption. Cinema, on the other hand, was observed to capture duration and (re)present it as change mummified.³ Barthes similarly argued that every photograph resembles death, due to its inherent ability to arrest and freeze time. Thus he famously outlined the *noeme* of photography as 'that-has-been'. When confronting certain images of the past, however, such as the portrait of the condemned Lewis Payne, this *noeme* is paradoxically conflated with the imminent 'this-will-be' of his death.⁴ From this perspective, the fixing of time always illuminates photography's subject as death in person, which the image brings back to life in the viewer's present as a living image of a dead thing.⁵ Amongst other ambitions, Sutton's project constitutes a bold attempt to challenge these established views and move beyond concepts of death and the frozen moment of photography. Viewing cinema itself as part of the 'event' of photography, Sutton further redraws the binary organizational principles regarding mobility/immobility and life/death traditionally applied to the two mediums.

Establishing how the photograph can surface as a time-image involves a great deal of critical engagement and philosophical groundwork that often challenges the reader; but this tough intellectual task is somewhat eased by a plethora of examples that help illuminate this new view on the nature of photographic time. Good examples can be found in Sutton's discussions of Michael Powell's *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), a cinematic narrative in which abstract chronological time is periodically frozen around the hero who can freely move within the interval between time and duration to gain two distinct experiences of time. Such scenes, Sutton argues, mirror our own experiences of exploring the photographic image. Within these interludes we are able to witness a metonymic overlapping of the actual and virtual, memory and fantasy, earthly and heavenly, which produce a crystal image of time. The project thereafter predominantly focuses upon a certain type of photography wherein timelessness is not necessarily equated with durationlessness.

3 See André Bazin, 'The ontology of the photographic image', in *What is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967).

4 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, NY: Vintage, 1993), pp. 80–96.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

Illuminating examples of these include an investigation into Gjon Mili's timed exposures, or 'cells of time', capturing Picasso drawing with a pen of light (p. 58). The silent and emptied Parisian photographs of Eugène Atget provide other interesting examples that are discussed as being nearly cinematic in nature on account of their camera consciousness. For Sutton, Atget's ghostly images capture a trace of the human within the emptied images and so directly pluck the captured instant from time as Aion and invoke 'the flourishing of past and future from the image' (p. 89).

Further investigations into the photographic crystal of time also broach other pertinent issues that have historically helped mould dominant philosophical discourses surrounding the photograph. Indeed, much 'philosophical' and aesthetic writing on photographs has taken an ontological approach towards the question of whether or not photography can be considered an art form or a representational mode. This was the major point of enquiry that intrigued critics such as Walter Benjamin, as well as more contemporary academic philosophers such as Roger Scruton and William L. King. Following Benjamin's seminal writing on the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, Scruton and King evaluate photographic aesthetics through painterly and dramaturgical frameworks, exploring the key differences in techniques, appearance and reception of the photographic image. For Scruton, aesthetic interest in a photograph is limited to an interest in its subject. From this perspective, the indexical nature of the photograph means that the camera apparatus is comparable to a reflecting mirror, an empty frame or a gesturing finger that cannot 'represent' anything. King counters this by critiquing Scruton's concept of the 'ideal photograph', which he sees as being limited to descriptions of the photographic record. Photographs can be a representational art, King argues, if we take time to consider the desires and techniques available to the photographer, and what it is that actually interests people when looking at photographic images.

By incorporating Guattarian models of aesthetic affect alongside Deleuzian concepts of the crystal image within his reading of photographs, Sutton provides a different solution to this complex area of philosophical debate. Indeed, in the cinematic and aesthetic philosophies of Deleuze and Guattari, images no longer necessarily 'represent' anything, but instead surface as a quasi table of contents, which mean and affect in and of themselves. In Sutton's most inspired investigation into the photographic time-image, formulated around Cindy Sherman's work, we can recognize how this new approach helps transgress Scruton's representational philosophical impasse. The best examples can be located in Sutton's explorations into a series of untitled images framed as (imaginary/false) film stills. These images are designed to summon up a sense of *deja vu* in the viewer, making connections with heterogeneous memories drawn from the abstract mass media machine. The 'film stills' are designed to create a space for curiosity and engage the viewer's memory and fantasies of cinema. The filmlike images thus imply a sense of narrative, and highlight the image's abstract connection to time. 'Each

image implies a narrative of which it is a part and that projects backward and forward in time around it' (p. 154). Sherman's pregnant images here necessarily offer various points of entry, and become surrounded by an aura or cloud of imagined virtual images that can create an affection-image of a complete film. Thus, each still leads to multiple (virtual) recollection of images and fantasies that project beyond the image into the past and future 'in an asymmetric, heterogeneous action' (p. 143). In these examples we find a decisive movement from a singularity (actual image) towards a multiplicity (virtual memories/fantasies) that aptly highlights how the photograph's actual context only exists as a *virtual image*. Sherman's work therefore helps illuminate how any fixed or stable 'interpretation' of the photographic image is impossible, with each interpretation fated to dissolve away as the viewer endlessly creates new meanings and readings that overlap and replace the last as it approaches the immanent. These photographs are neither dead nor frozen, then, nor do they attempt to represent anything in the traditional artistic sense. Instead, each image emerges with a creative life of its own, which is activated during the creative assemblage with the viewer. Sutton ultimately identifies Sherman's still images as the seeds of a crystal, which by conflating the actual and virtual necessarily move beyond any need for older representational paradigms to understanding photography as an art form.

Sutton keeps one eye on the embedding context at all times, considering the changing role and function of photographs within the abstract machine of culture. Accordingly, the project often shifts focus to engage in analysis of other image types rhizomatically linked to photography and film. These include the comic strips of Winsor McCay and Chester Gould and the paintings of Edouard Manet and Andy Warhol, to name but a few. This wider contextual consideration is arguably most overt in the final chapter of Sutton's book, which sees him investigate the changes photography and film are undergoing in the telecommunications age. By creatively weaving together cultural observation with the theories of writers such as Pierre Teilhard, Manuel DeLanda and Deleuze-Guattari, Sutton explores photography's complex relationship with the concepts of *immemory* and becoming.

Sutton's handling of these lively and intellectually formidable issues throughout witnesses him fluctuate between esoteric and exoteric modes of address. On account of this, *Photography, Cinema, Memory* should appeal to a broad readership composed of curious and serious readers interested in the relations between photography, cinema and new media. The nuanced philosophical engagement with photography which pushes Deleuzian models beyond their original scope will no doubt provide challenging and stimulating food for thought for the most committed academic, or indeed anyone seriously interested in the contemporary critical and philosophical debates surrounding audiovisual media.

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Asuman Suner, *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity and Memory*. London and New York, NY: IB Tauris, 2009, 209 pp.

Deniz Bayrakdar (ed.), *Cinema and Politics: Turkish Cinema and the New Europe*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009, 293 pp.

Dina Iordanova, David Martin-Jones and Belén Vidal (eds), *Cinema at the Periphery*. Detroit, IL: Wayne State University Press, 2010, 268 pp.

LAURENCE RAW

Since the mid 1990s there has been a renaissance in Turkish cinema in terms of both film production and attendance. The old-style picture houses have been superseded by multiplexes offering a variety of attractions, including Hollywood blockbusters as well as locally produced hits. Popular films such as *Eşkiya/The Bandit* (Yavuz Turgul, 1996), *Vizontele* (Yılmaz Erdoğan and Ömer Faruk Sorak, 2001), *G. O. R. A.* (Ömer Faruk Sorak, 2002), and the anti-American polemic *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak/Valley of the Wolves: Iraq* (Serdar Akar and Sadullah Sentürk, 2006) have attracted audiences in record numbers. At the same time several directors, including Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Zeki Demirkubuz and Derviş Zaim, have made names for themselves with a series of low-budget independent films, both domestically and abroad. Ceylan's *İklimler/Climates* (2006), for example, received the Fipresci prize in competition at the Cannes Film Festival of 2007. Both Asuman Suner's *New Turkish Cinema* and Deniz Bayrakdar's collection *Cinema and Politics* analyze these developments, while suggesting that Turkish cinema should be approached on its own terms, raising issues that differ significantly from other national cinemas.

One such issue is that of popular nostalgia – the evocation of an idealized (often lost) world of the past that contrasts with the disordered present. Suner's *New Turkish Cinema* shows how this past can either concentrate on the domestic (the worlds of home and family) or the political (the deliberate evocation of the Turkish Republic's Ottoman past, when it was still considered a great European power). Turgul's *Eşkiya* depicts the destruction of traditional values such as honesty, heroism and honour in the brutal world of mid-1990s Istanbul, a place of relentless materialism and self-interest. Erdoğan's *Vizontele* traces a similar thematic path, as it shows how the tranquility of a rural Turkish village is destroyed through the introduction of television broadcasting. In the past the citizens had to worry only about themselves; now they are exposed to the uncomfortable realities of the outside world, as they learn how some of their friends were brutally massacred during the Cyprus conflict of 1974.

These issues are also raised in Bayrakdar's *Cinema and Politics*. In an essay titled 'Critical thoughts on the New Turkish Cinema', Zahit Atam looks at the work of low-budget filmmakers such as Nuri Bilge Ceylan, whose film *Uzak/Distant* (2002) portrays the conflict of values dominating many people's lives, particularly those who have migrated from the country to the city in search of work only to find to their cost that

they have sacrificed the sense of community and kinship that sustained them back home. Atam comments: 'What is hopeless [about this film] are the conditions they are in, millions of people are in the same situation, the crisis is not only in town, it is everywhere in Turkey' (p. 217).

This sense of loss is also evident in films such as *Sonbahar/Autumn* (Özcan Alper, 2008). In 'Landscapes of loss in contemporary Turkish cinema', Övgü Gökçe shows how this film integrates the central character Yusuf's (Onur Saylak) return to his Black Sea homeland with the actual events taking place on 22 December 2000, when the security forces finally managed to curtail the hunger strikes in Turkish prisons, many of which had become death fasts. Through this technique of 'writing on history' (p. 278), Yusuf experiences loss in two ways: he has not only lost his freedom through imprisonment, but has lost the innocence associated with his childhood on the Black Sea.

Kaya Özkaracalar's essay 'Representations of imperialism in Turkish cinema' demonstrates how Akar and Şentürk's *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak* adopts a more positive view of the past, as it portrays the central character Polat Alemdar (Necati Şaşmaz) as a force for good as he embarks on a crusade against the American Special Forces commander (Billy Zane), who was previously responsible for deporting eleven Turkish soldiers from northern Iraq. Needless to say Alemdar is successful in his quest; at the end of the film he pays tribute to the Ottomans, who were the only colonial power not to tyrannize 'the people of this land' (Iraq). Hande Yedidal's essay 'The transformation of the image of the invincible Turk' looks at the Kara Murat films of the 1970s and the recent success *Son Osmanlı Yandım Ali/ Yandım Ali – The Last Ottoman* (2007). Originally derived from popular comic strips, these films contain central characters who combine superhuman strength and impeccable manners with an unswerving loyalty to their country. Yandım Ali (Kenan Imirzalıoğlu) eludes the clutches of Lawrence of Arabia and ends up fighting for the Turks during the War of Independence (1921-22). He eventually discovers the true path of righteousness: to sublimate his individuality in the national interest. Yedidal argues that this issue was particularly significant at the time of the film's release: the creator of the original comic strip, Suat Yalaz, was given an award for services to Turkish culture by the Education Union's Yesevi foundation (p. 198).

At the same time Yedidal suggests that such films emphasize the importance of official ideology in which everyone, regardless of religion, language or race, is automatically classified as a Turk, and where dissenting voices are invariably censured for 'acting unethical [sic] and threatening Turkish traditions and customs, regardless of their social status' (p. 198). The director Yılmaz Güney experienced the consequences of this at first hand, as he was repeatedly imprisoned on a variety of charges, ranging from publishing a communist novel to harbouring anarchist students. He escaped from prison in 1981 and fled to France, where he spent the remainder of his life. Eylem Kaftan's essay 'Allegorical failure in *Süru/The Herd* and *Yol/The Way*' considers two of

his films, one (*Sürü*) focusing on the experiences of the Kurds and the other concentrating on the experiences of several prisoners on the move in Turkey. In *Yol* (1982) the central character Seyyid (Tarık Akan) is duty-bound by feudal tradition to execute his wife Zine (Şerif Sezer), who has escaped from her father-in-law's house and become a prostitute. However Seyyid finds himself unable to carry out his duty: while trying his best to neglect her while they are on their travels, he realizes that he does not want her to die, and so whips her to ensure she remains awake. Kaftan believes that this act of 'twisted intimacy' (p. 159) shows how difficult it can be for men to deal with the responsibilities imposed on them by a patriarchal culture.

Suner's *New Turkish Cinema* shows how several contemporary filmmakers have followed Güney's example by focusing on the problematics of identity construction. In *Çamur/Mud* (2003), Derviş Zaim tackles the issue of Cypriot-Turkish identity by showing how the main characters can never escape the destructive effects of the past, despite efforts to reconcile the two communities – Greeks and Turks – on the island. Yeşim Ustaoglu's *Güneşe Yolculuk/Journey to the Sun* (1999) focuses on what it means to look like a Kurd in the mid 1990s; to experience persecution and arrest by the police on account of one's skin colour. *Yazı Tura/Toss-Up* (Uğur Yücel, 2004), breaks new ground by analyzing the experiences of those forced to complete their compulsory military service in south-eastern Turkey. Suner contends that all three films move beyond 'the hegemonic discourse of nationalism', concentrating instead on 'the multiplicity of the experiences of displacement, de-territorialization and migration' (pp. 73-74). They deconstruct the one-nation conception of Turkishness that lies at the heart of official ideology, portraying the country instead as 'a locus of divergent ethnic, religious and cultural identities' (p. 75).

Suner suggests later in the book that identity construction in Turkish cinema can only really be understood through the metaphor of *ebru* – literally translated as 'marbled paper' (p. 161). However the word in English conveys little of the religious, cultural and historical significance associated with this Ottoman tradition of artistic expression: 'An *ebru* artist creates his or her drawing with oil-based paint on water and then transfers this flowing artwork onto paper' (p. 162). In cinematic terms *ebru* connotes fluidity, interconnectedness, contradiction – a refusal to be constrained by absolutes in terms of construction or subject matter. The German-Turkish director Fatih Akin's *Istanbul Hatırası/Crossing the Bridge: the Sound of Istanbul* (2005), a documentary on the popular music scene both past and present, transforms the city into a multiplicity of sounds and/or cultural traditions. *Anlat Istanbul/Istanbul Tales* (2005), a portmanteau film by five different directors (Ümit Ünal, Kudret Sabancı, Selim Demirdelen, Yücel Yolcu and Ömür Atay) offers a similar representation with its parallel stories and self-reflexive narration, even though Suner criticizes the film for its use of the 'good old cliché' of portraying Istanbul as a site of contamination and corruption (p. 151).

Other directors look at the idea of *eburu* in different ways. Like the Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami, Nuri Bilge Ceylan's oeuvre stresses that life has its own logic which should be experienced rather than rationalized. This can be seen, for instance, in the director's fondness for closeups, which according to Suner invest characters' faces and/or objects with 'an independent existence in the narrative, without having a fictional reality determined by the demands of the situation' (pp. 96-97). Ceylan is not concerned with conveying a particular message; rather he highlights the contradictions inherent in every social encounter. Suner quotes an interview in which Ceylan claims that 'Underneath [people's conversations] there is always another reality. ... That's why I prefer to use gestures and expressions and situations; saying what the film is about with dialogue is not convincing for me' (p. 98). Zeki Demirkubuz's films communicate similar tensions: while his characters seem unable to control their destinies, they simultaneously make an active choice by accepting their fates. Suner observes: 'What appears to be a self-conscious attitude is often a self-conscious choice' (p. 98). This renders them difficult to pin down; what they tell us through dialogue might be truthful yet false. Like Ceylan, Demirkubuz's principal concern is to investigate the complexities of a specific social situation – as a result, Suner claims, his films are 'opaque, difficult to penetrate, and at the same time open to multiple readings' (p. 139). The *eburu* metaphor helps us to negotiate such readings.

To date most of the leading figures in new Turkish cinema have been male – apart from isolated exceptions such as Yeşim Ustaoğlu. Suner argues that this tends to undermine the radical force of many recent films, whose female characters are invariably represented 'as they are seen by men ... as objects of male desire' (p. 175). The young woman in Derviş Zaim's *Tabutta Rövaşata/Somersault in a Coffin* (1996) and the mysterious lover in Ceylan's *Uzak* are but two examples. However there are signs that this state of affairs might be about to change, as documentary filmmakers such as Pelin Esmer have produced works like *Oyun/The Play* (2005), which depicts a group of women in southern Turkey staging a play about their own lives and undergoing a process of transformation as a result. Suner believes that such works, which powerfully problematize the patriarchal culture in Turkey, will have a significant impact on young filmmakers once they receive wider distribution.

Interestingly Suner devotes scant attention to the ways in which Islamic issues have been addressed in recent Turkish films. We have to turn to Özlem Avcı and Berna Uçarol Kılınç's 'Islamic ways of life reflected on the silver screen' in *Cinema and Politics* to find out more. This essay is descriptive rather than analytical, showing how filmmakers have tried to integrate the old with the new (in other words, the kind of Islam that incorporates both secularism and capitalism). This kind of synthesis, which Avcı and Kılınç believe can be achieved through negotiating binary oppositions (urban/rural, traditional/modern), is something which has been pursued by successive governments in Turkey since the early 1990s.

Several films – for example, Mustafa Çelik's *Kelebekler Sonsuza Uçar/ Butterflies Fly to Eternity* (1993) or more recently Ismail Güneş' *Imam/ The Imam* (2005) – portray the consequences of such developments onscreen.

Although not directly focusing on recent developments in Turkish cinema, Iordanova, Martin-Jones and Vidal's edited collection *Cinema at the Periphery* offers some suggestive ways to assess its impact, both domestically and internationally. Iordanova's essay 'Global cinema's long tail' shows how peripheral cinemas (those outside the European and US mainstream) have benefited from alternative distribution networks – for example diasporic communities (Pakistanis in the UK, Turks in Germany) – which readily embrace the imports of filmed entertainment from their countries of origin: 'videos and DVDs are often imported alongside ethnic groceries and are featured alongside the traditional foodstuffs on the shelves of convenience stores catering to the immigrant community' (p. 34). The internet and YouTube likewise provide alternative platforms for non-mainstream cinema.

Duncan Petrie's essay 'Cinema in a settler society' proposes four categories of production in New Zealand: First Cinema refers to the commercial mainstream of Hollywood and its imitators; Second Cinema to auteur cinema; Third Cinema to oppositional cinema informed by anti-imperialist struggle and a commitment to alternative production strategies. All three are products of a settler society. Fourth Cinema, on the other hand, is a genuinely indigenous response to settler hegemony (p. 79). Sometimes, however, hegemonies have a habit of striking back. Sheldon H. Lu suggests that while censorship in China has become more relaxed over the past decade, there remain certain no-go areas. Lou Ye's independent feature *Yiheyuan/Summer Palace* (2006) touches on the sensitive subject of Tian'anmen Square, and includes sex scenes; the film was promptly banned in China while the director was censured, blacklisted and prohibited from making films in his own country for five years. Lu comments: 'Chinese film censors appear immature and do not know how to handle problems and complaints' (p. 116).

Martin-Jones's 'Landscape and the past in recent Scottish-Gaelic films' shows how Gaelic filmmakers use the landscape to keep the past alive, and to remind local viewers of the significance of their traditions. The interaction between past and present is also discussed in Patricia Pisters's 'Nostalgia, postcolonial agency, and preposterous history', with reference to films set in Tangier. In an ever-changing world, where notions of centre and periphery are perpetually subject to (re)negotiation, the past – as represented through objects or through shared memories – retains a constancy that helps to remind individuals of where they came from. Laura U. Marks shows how elements from within the 'infinite breadth of the past' have been rediscovered by Arab filmmakers in defiance of the 'censorious and idiotic codes' imposed on them by the cinematic mainstream. As a result they have created 'unanticipated and heart-

stopping images [of contemporary Arab culture] that make experience richer' (p. 250).

All of these experiences have their parallels in modern Turkish cinema. Documentary filmmakers such as Pelin Esmer represent Fourth Cinema, as they write back to the male hegemony which has been reinforced both in First and Second Cinema (for example by male auteur-directors such as Ceylan). Esmer's work might become more widely disseminated through alternative outlets such as the internet. The issue of censorship remains a sensitive one; although today's directors would not encounter the kind of suffering experienced by Güney, they are still vulnerable to criticism that they are not operating in the national interest. Some critics accused Tolga Örnek, the American-educated director of the acclaimed documentary *Gelibolu/Gallipoli* (2005) of subversiveness, simply because he looked at the conflict from several points of view – Turkish, British and Anzac. At the same time many filmmakers have defied established viewpoints and looked for new and challenging subjects, such as the experiences of military conscripts in *Yazı Tura*. This kind of 'guerrilla filmmaking' (to use a term coined by Derviş Zaim) has become increasingly widespread in contemporary Turkish cinema.

All three books celebrate the impact of new Turkish cinema over the last two decades, both in Turkey and elsewhere. Suner's *New Turkish Cinema* is lucidly written; it not only provides a comprehensive introduction to the topic but offers a wealth of suggestions for future research. As with any edited collection, *Cinema and Politics* includes contributions of variable quality; sometimes the proofreading might have been more assiduous, but the book nonetheless offers a valuable resource-bank of articles and references. *Cinema at the Periphery* reminds us that, while Turkish cinema possesses its unique qualities – for example, those films that exploit the *ebri* metaphor – it is nonetheless part of a wider movement in peripheral cinema, which can be understood both as a mode of practice and as a narrative constructed on the margins that challenges establishes and/or redefines established ideologies. One further example should make the point clear: Kay Dickinson's 'The Palestinian road (block) movie' in *Cinema at the Periphery* looks at how local filmmakers appropriate an international genre and use it to create 'a space for identification that undercuts the more negative, abject implications of the periphery' (p. 150). Likewise, in films such as *Yol* or *Uzak* the protagonists take to the road, which becomes a site for discovering new forms of identification that defy established notions of feudalism, community and tradition.

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1. Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton et al. (London: Macmillan, 1982).
2. Ginette Vincendeau, 'Melodramatic realism: on some French women's films in the 1930s', *Screen*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1989), pp. 51–65.
3. Monika Treut, 'Female misbehaviour', in Laura Pietropaolo and Ada Testaferri (eds), *Feminisms in the Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 106–21.

References to *films* in both notes and main text should include full title, and in the case of non-English language films original release title should precede US and/or British release title, followed by director and release date in round brackets: *A bout de souffle/Breathless* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960)

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